

# 6 Dewdney Trail

**Hope to Wild Horse Creek, B.C.**  
**1860 to Princeton**  
**1861 to Rock Creek**  
**1865 to Wild Horse Creek**



(Okanagan Similkameen Parks Society)

## Historic Place

The Dewdney Trail is a 720 kilometre trail that traverses the Province of British Columbia near the American border between the present-day locations of Hope on the Fraser River and Wild Horse Creek at Fisherville just north of Ft. Steele in the East Kootenays. It crosses the Cascade, Monashee, Selkirk and Purcell mountain ranges, and connects the coastal Fraser and Skagit valleys with the Interior Similkameen, Okanagan, Kettle, Columbia, Pend d'Oreille, Salmon, Moyie, and Kootenay River valleys, which are all part of the Columbia River watershed.

While most of the trail was constructed as a mule path with a four foot wide minimum clearance and two foot wide surface, the western-most 40 kilometres of the trail was built as a wagon road with a much firmer and wider trail surface.

The trail is various states of physical repair, with many sections overgrown due to infrequent use and maintenance.

## Values

The 1860s Dewdney Trail is important for its historical, economic, cultural, social and natural history values as an enduring defining initiative of the newly created Colony of British Columbia. It's purpose was to connect the economic regions of British Columbia and secure the control of land, settlement and trade in the region immediately north of the American frontier line that extended across the natural north-south mountain ranges and trade routes and dividing the Colony from American territory.

The Trail uniquely marks the scope and urgency of this Colonial drive in the face of American miners' rush for gold first to Rock Creek in 1860 and then to Wild Horse Creek in 1863.

In British Columbia, historic trails often have a connection to earlier First Nation trails along the same routes. The existing network of First Nation trails was a significant foundation for making many newcomer activities possible, including exploration, travel, transportation of goods, communications and economic development. Important examples of those earlier routes incorporated into the Dewdney Trail are the Hudson's Bay Company Brigade Trail and Blackeye's Trail – both located within Stó:lo, Nlaka'pamux and Similkameen traditional territory, and used by First Nations to gather plants, hunt, and trade over the Cascade Mountains.

The route is also significant for its use by Hudson's Bay Company fur traders and its connection to the Walla Walla Trail connecting Wild Horse Creek with the American town of Walla Walla in Washington State.



### Dewdney Trail



The Dewdney Trail is valued for its contribution to the opening up and economic development of the southern regions of British Columbia, for its role in the creation and location of many present-day settler communities, for being the pioneering route for much of the Southern Provincial Highway (Highway 3), and for lending its name to the city of Trail.

The Dewdney Trail is valued for bringing together the stories of First Nations and provincially known colonial figures and groups, including Similkameen chief “Blackeye”, Sto:lo chief Pahallak, surveyors Alexander Caulfield Anderson and Henry Peers, trail builders Edgar Dewdney and Walter Moberly, administrators Governor James Douglas and Judge Matthew Begbie, the North West Mounted Police’s Sam Steele and the many settlers who traversed and homesteaded along the route. The Trail is valued for the stories of its builders that include First Nations and Chinese crews as well as the Royal Engineers.

Many of these stories are celebrated through interpretation and signs along the trail and in museums across the province.

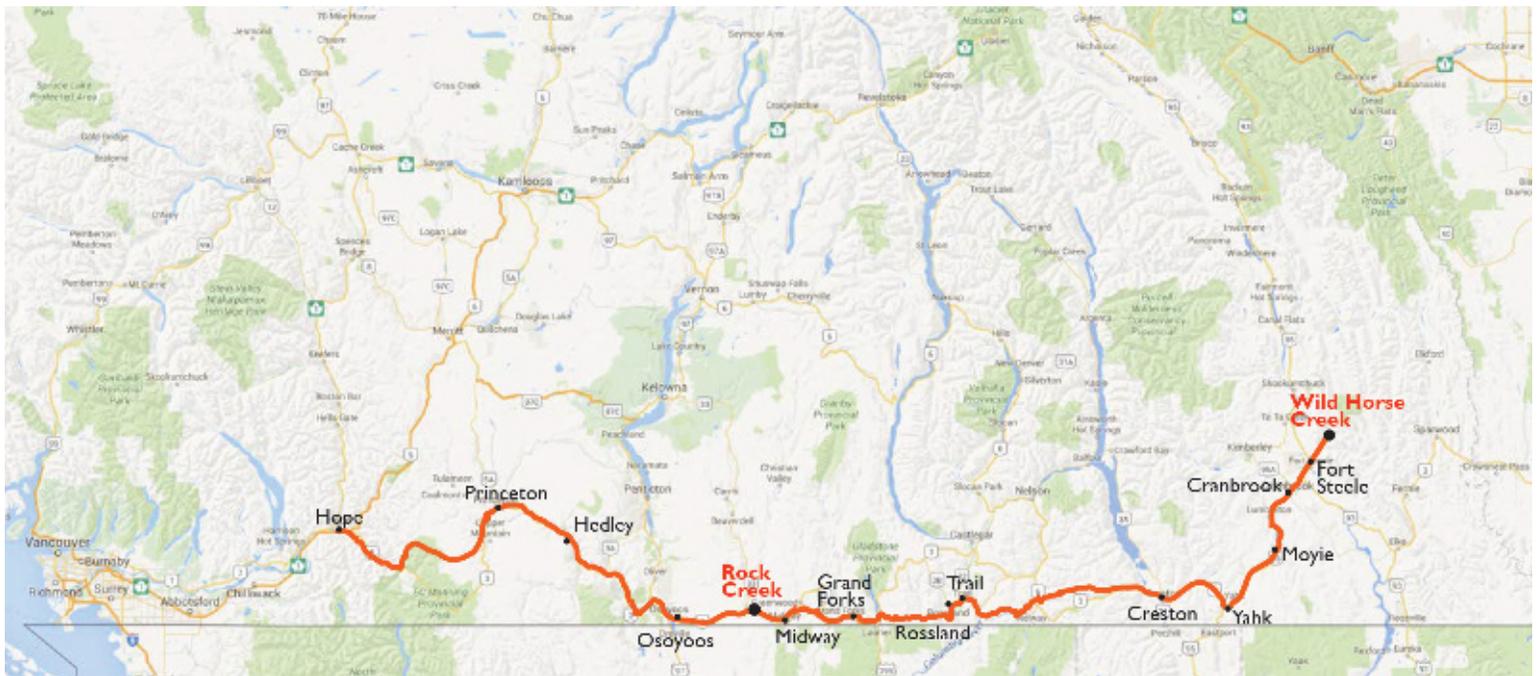
The simple design specification of the 1860 Dewdney Trail, a one-and-a-half foot wide bed with a four foot clear width at shoulder height for the passage of laden mules, is significant for illustrating the Colony’s need for a basic dependable mule path that could be constructed quickly through rugged remote terrain.

The 40 westernmost kilometres of the Trail constructed in 1861 by the Royal Engineers to wagon road specifications is valued for marking the Colony’s expectation of a sustained rise of traffic between the Colonial coast, Rock Creek and beyond. Curtailment of the wagon road upgrade marks the abrupt downturn in traffic along the route caused by the mining out of Rock Creek’s gold by the end of 1861.

Many sections of the Trail are valued today by horse-riders and hikers as beautiful recreational paths that lead into less-developed landscapes, in places isolated from the noise and bustle of Highway 3 and side roads.

#### Character-defining Elements

- Location across the dramatic Cascade, Monashee, Selkirk and Purcell Ranges
- Location through parts of the Fraser, Skagit, Similkameen, Okanagan, Kettle, Columbia, Pend d’Oreille, Salmon, Moyie and Kootenay Valleys
- Surveyed route from Hope to Wild Horse Creek (at Fisherville)
- Trail clear width of 4’ where evidenced
- Trail firm 2’ wide bed where evidenced
- Trail maximum 1/12 sloped grading where evidenced
- Royal Engineers’ wagon road construction where evidenced (as far as 25 mile east of Hope)
- Views of the surrounding Coastal and Interior landscapes
- Sites and communities along the trail route associated with the historical route
- Signs, trailheads plaques and interpretation in many areas along the route
- The potential for archaeological remains along the trail route



Route of the Dewdney Trail overlaid on contemporary map of Southern B.C.

#### Sources

Anderson, Frank W. *The Dewdney Trail: Hope to Rock Creek*. Calgary: Frontier Publishing, 1972.

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