

1. THE CARLTON TRAIL

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Minnedosa, first called Tanner's Crossing after the one-armed Metis postmaster whose home was located there in the 1870s, has always been a focal point of pioneer trails, railways, highways and roads. Minnedosa (Indian for "running water"), nestling in the picturesque valley of a meandering river bearing its name, was a converging zone for Red River ox cart and buffalo hunting trails long before it became a permanent settlement. Before that it apparently was the site of an Indian "odanah", a temporary camping ground from which the pass derives its name. No transportation route was ever more useful or colorful than the Carlton (or Saskatchewan) Trail.

The Carlton Trail originated at Upper Fort Garry (Winnipeg) on the junction of the Red and Assiniboine and terminated where Edmonton now stands. Its 900-mile tortuous length wound across plains and sloughs, hills and valleys, streams and rivers, around pot holes, lakes. As ox carts seldom travelled single file its width usually exceeded that of modern freeways.

Winnipeg's Portage Avenue once constituted the first stretch of the famed Carlton Trail. At Portage la Prairie the trail branched into two alternative routes for 90 miles. The south branch continued west for 20 miles, then veered slightly southwest along an old bison hunting trail (which continued to where Brandon now stands, curving southwest to a bend in the Souris River and then on to Missouri River country). After leaving the buffalo hunting trail the south branch turned northwest passing through CNR station Gregg, fording the the White-mud near Oberon (hamlet between Carberry and Neepawa) and the Minnedosa River (then called Little Saskatchewan) at Hare's Crossing four miles west of the present town of Minnedosa.

The north branch of the trail ran northwest from Portage la Prairie to Westbourne and swerved past Woodside to Gladstone crossing the Whitemud three times approximating roughly today's Highway 4. It then swung slightly north passing three miles north of present Neepawa crossing Minnedosa Valley at Old Crossing two miles northeast of Minnedosa (near the north shore of present Minnedosa Lake). Approximately 20 miles west and five miles north of Minnedosa it rejoined the south branch. From here it headed for Shoal Lake, on through Saskatchewan to Edmonton.

Tanner's Crossing, located between Hare's Crossing and Old Crossing, serviced a short link-up trail traversing the area encompassed by these two branches of the Carlton. Northwest of Minnedosa it emerged from the valley through Odanah Pass. To the south it climbed the more gradual slope where Minnedosa's new RCMP barracks with its 12-man detachment headed by Sgt. J. Horn now stands vigil; a detachment responsible for policing much of the area once served by these three routes. At one time C. Manners operated a pump and well casing shop there. Then Pickering, a Master of the Hounds type, operated an underground kennel of registered fox terriers and hounds. Mrs. Jim Stewart, who lives nearby, recalls not only this trail but the fact she and her brother loved dogs and often received free pups of non-show quality from the owner--much to their parents' consternation. This shorter trail slashed across the Carlton continuing south to Brandon and was locally dubbed Brandon Trail.

Less than a mile north of the present junction of Highways 10, 4 and 4A the north route of the trail cut westward. In 1902 David Comrie Sr. came to the farm immediately west of Highway 10 as a boy of 12 from Paisley, Renfrewshire, Scotland, settling there with his parents John and Elizabeth and siblings John (killed by German sniper fire in the First World War while on sentry duty), Andrew (wounded in same war), Elizabeth, Peter (killed in traffic accident four years ago in almost precisely this spot). He recalls his father fencing off this trail which was by then used very little. He says many of the old property deeds referred to this trail while others didn't. He recalls well the district's favorite anecdote of a jug of brew dropping on the trail from a passing vehicle. It seems it was discovered by one local pioneer's enterprising son who mysteriously disappeared one hot summer day. A brother sent to find him also vanished. The father soon followed suit and the disgusted mother finally located the trio who were in no fit condition to till any more soil that day. Mr. Comrie recalls even more vividly an expensive flat tire on his tractor some years later on the same trail from a puncture by a pair of scissors for which some disappointed settler's wife in Canada's Northwest no doubt searched unsuccessfully upon arrival at their new homestead.

To the east of Highway 10 at the same point lie the Gordon and Jury farms. Frank Jury, who moved there in 1918 with his wife Rose, remembers the Carlton Trail well. Although no longer used by settlers travelling west it was still used occasionally by Indians from Rolling River reserve coming to Minnedosa for supplies or to attend the summer fair.