Long trail between Hog's Back/Mooney's Bay and Britannia Bay at Lac Deschenes

Several references indicate a long Indigenous trail in existence in the early 1800s between what is now Hog's Back/Mooney's Bay on the Rideau River and Britannia Bay at Lac Deschenes. This trail would have been used by paddlers travelling down the Rideau River and looking for a direct route to Britannia Bay where they could continue upriver on the Ottawa.

Prior to the construction of the Rideau Canal completed in 1832, the current Hog's Back Falls did not exist. Instead, the river was marked by a short set of rapids known as Three Rock Rapids. The river above the rapids where Mooney's Bay now exists was much narrower. At the head of Mooney's Bay was another set of rapids known as Three Island Rapids. The construction of canal involved a high dam built on top of the Three Rock Rapids and which raised the water level above the dam by about 13 metres, creating today's Mooney's Bay and largely drowning the rapids upstream. The current Hog's Back Falls was created as the spillway to the dam. Paddlers coming down the Rideau River and wanting to paddle up the Ottawa River would have to manage these two rapids, plus several others and Rideau Falls to reach the Ottawa River. Then, they would paddle up the Ottawa River, with portages at the Chaudiere Falls, the Remick Rapids and the Deschenes Rapids to reach Britannia Bay – a total of 31 kilometres with several portages. Paddlers with light loads for a single trip portage could take a shortcut directly from the area around Three Rock Rapids and Three Island Rapids across flat ground to Britannia Bay, about 8 kilometers. Such a trail would have been narrow, no more than one person wide, and not necessarily straight if it avoided swampy ground.

There is evidence for the existence and location of the trail. The 1938 reminiscences of F.R. Latchford, former Chief Justice of Ontario, provide numerous details.[1] Justice Latchford was a former resident of Ottawa and wrote details of a conversation he had with an "old timer" who, as a young man, likely obtained details of the trail from someone who had been on it.

Justice Latchford's concern was how Rice Honeywell, an early settler of Ottawa, managed in 1811 to take his "jumper" (cart) and oxen from Hog's Back to his land on the shores of Lac Deschenes through a seemingly impenetrable forest?

> *How did Honeywell get through almost four miles of forest with his oxen and a "jumper" loaded with provisions? I put the question to the old resident and was promptly, and I think accurately answered. "Why", he said, "along the Indian track between the two rivers. It was well marked at one time. Now the woods have been replaced by fields".*
>
> *He rambled on and on, much as I am doing here. The trail "forked", he said, near-by where we were sitting chatting, one course ending in Baker's Bay and the other above the rapids. As usual the route followed was the shortest distance between waters navigable by canoes" (Note: the two men were meeting in Latchford's house at the intersection of Byron and Woodroofe Avenues)*

The old timer recounted the tragic story of a young woman who walked the trail from Hog's Back "to a point beyond where Le Breton's mill once stood, and there end her life."

In a 1927 article in the Ottawa Citizen Justice Latchford speculated that Rice Honeywell could have taken oxen on this narrow trail by placing them one in front of the other.[2]

From these sources, the following details seem apparent:

- The “Indian” trail ran between Hog’s Back and Britannia Bay
- It was well used and wide enough for oxen to pull a small wagon
- The trail forked near the intersection of Woodroofe and Byron Avenues with one branch leading to Baker’s Bay on the Ottawa River and the other “above the rapids” on the Ottawa River
- It was almost 4 miles in length, along the shortest distance between two navigable bodies of water
- It passed near “LeBreton’s mill” on the Ottawa River

To reconstruct the route, the locations of Baker’s Bay and the old LeBreton mills are key. No map has been found which names Baker’s Bay. Its location could very well have been the small bay which could have taken its name from G.W. Baker who owned the property by the bay as shown on Belden & Co’s 1879 map of Carleton County (Figure 1). This is just west of Honeywell’s property. This same map also shows the location of LeBreton’s grist mill, marked as “old mill” built in 1826-27 by Capt. John LeBreton in what is now Britannia.[3] This was the first mill on the south side of the Ottawa River above the Deschenes rapids. These two locations fit the description with respect to the rapids – Baker’s Bay is downstream of the Deschenes rapids, while the old mill is upstream (Figure 1).

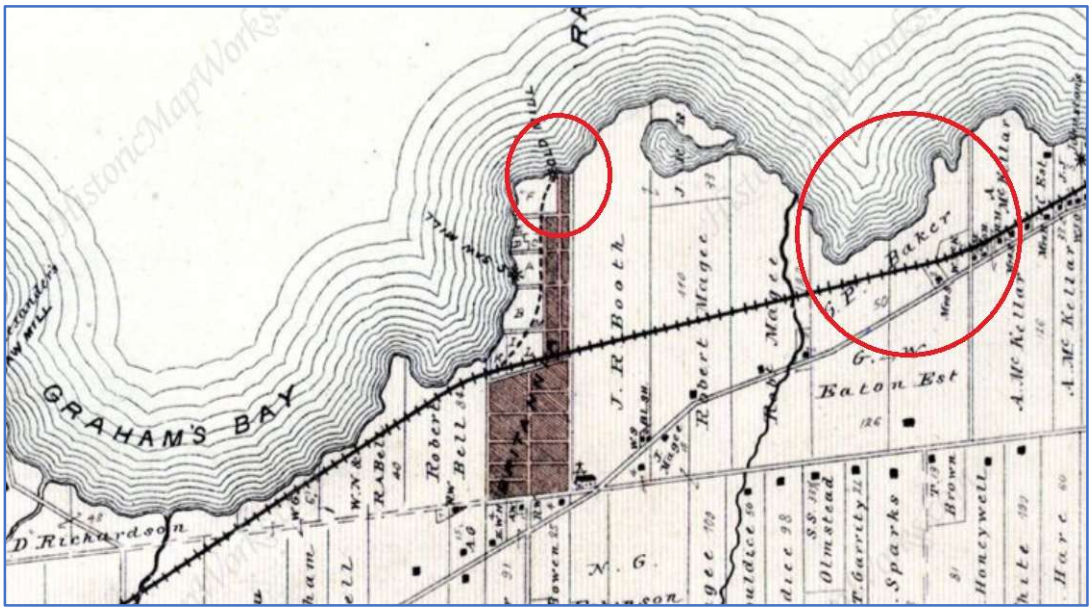

Figure 1 ***map of Carleton County*** *showing location of Baker's Bay (right circle) and LeBreton's old mill (left circle). Source: Belden & Co Illustrated Historical Atlas County Carleton, Nepean map; H Belden & Co, Toronto, 1879. Note Britannia Bay’ name in 1879 was Graham’s Bay* http://www.historicmapworks.com/Map/CA/10/Nepean+Township/Carleton+County+1879/Ontario/

Why did the trail branch? It is shorter to end the portage in Baker’s Bay, but that would mean travelling upstream along the south shore through the Deschenes Rapids. That could be done in low water by hauling the canoes up the rapids, but during the spring flood it would be safer to continue portaging over the longer route. It would have also been used as a winter trail when the currents in the Ottawa River and the in the Rideau River would have made the ice unsafe.

According to Justice Blatchford, the Rideau River end of the trail was located at Hog's Back. Presumably, this meant in the Mooney's Bay area. It is possible that the portage started a little further upstream at the head to the Three Island rapids.

This location is supported by the history of roads in Nepean township. According to Bruce Elliot in his 1991 The City Beyond – A History of Nepean, Birthplace of Canada's Capital, 1792 – 1990:

> *Up to this time there had been three roads in the township. One had been cut through by the government in 1815 to connect the Hull and Rideau Settlements. It ran from the Chaudière southeast to Dow's, where it crossed the river (though Billing's Bridge was not built until 1830) and ran along the Gloucester shore to Black Rapids, where it recrossed to Nepean and ran past Collin's to the North Gower Line. A second road ran from Honeywells on the Ottawa southeast to Lot 30 on the Rideau, opposite the residence of Capt. Andrew Wilson in Gloucester. McNaughton called it an 'old road' when surveying in 1824, and it is said to have been 'bushed out' by Honeywell in the summer of 1814 to bring barrels of flour up from Prescott. It may have been an Indian trail before that. It continued to be used by lumbermen and others until the mid-1830s (by which time it was abandoned – p. 41). The third was the Richmond Road which the soldiers had cut across the township from Richmond landing to the Goulbourn line in 1818.*[4] (underline added)

Lot 30, according to the Belden map of 1879 of Nepean, is located at the head of the Three Island Rapids.

This location is further supported by the appearance of this road on Joseph Bouchette's 1831 map which shows it ending at "Capt Wilson's" and above the Three Rock Rapids. (Figure 2) This road travels in a straight line almost to the Ottawa River, where it aims to the Honeywell property, slightly downstream from Baker's Bay.

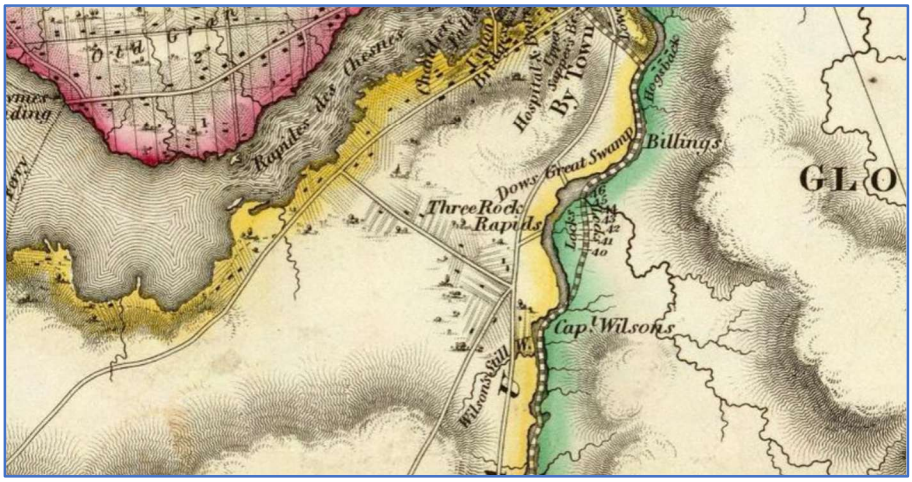

Figure 2 detail of Joseph Bouchette 1831 map showing road between the head of Three Island Rapids (first rapids upstream of Hog's Back) and Britannia Bay source https://www.davidrumsey.com/luna/servlet/detail/RUMSEY~8~1~3259~350033:To-his-most-Excellent-Majesty,-King

The actual route of the portage is likely found marked as a road in Anthony Swalwell's map of 1830 (Figure 3). This leads from lot 24 on the Ottawa River at a location that matches Baker's Bay to just upstream of Three Island Rapids on the Rideau River.

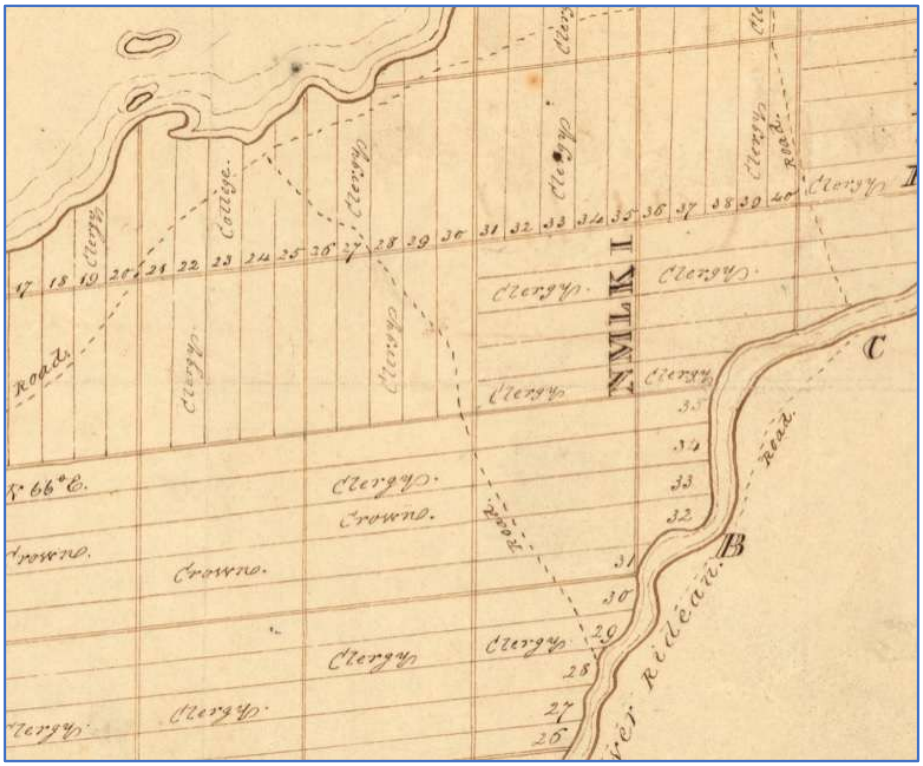

Figure 3 portion of Swalwell map of 1830 showing the road between the Rideau River and Lac Deschenes. Source [Map of the Township of Nepean in the District of Bathurst and Province of Upper Canada. by Anthony Swallwell, 15th March, 1830. [cartographic material] (bac-lac.gc.ca)]

Putting it all together results in a reconstruction of the trail location consistent with the known evidence. (Figure 4).

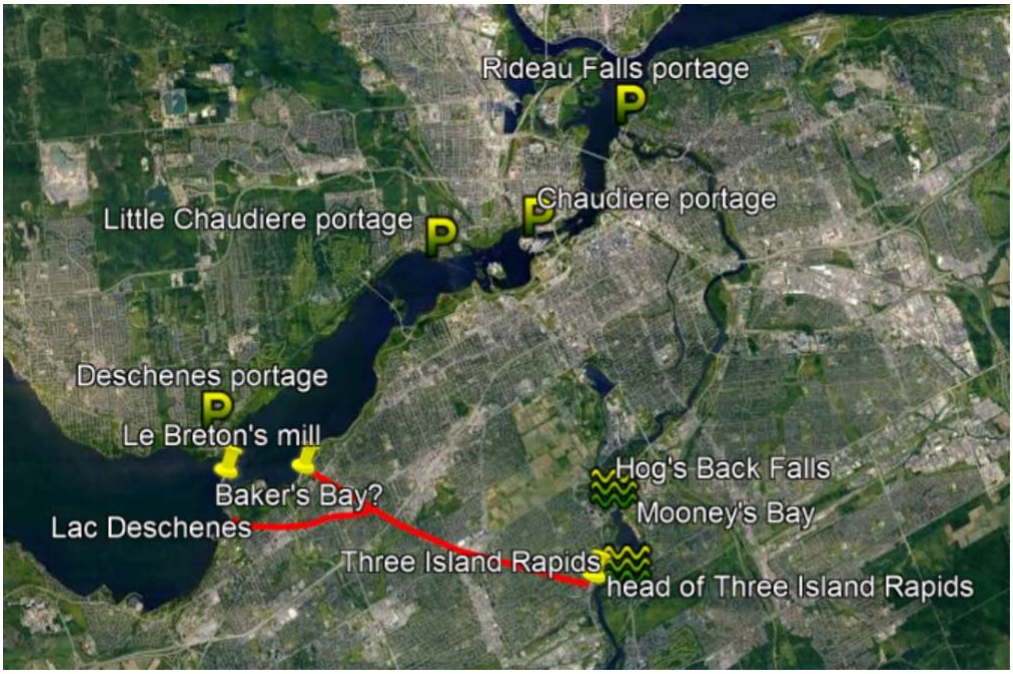

Figure 4: location of named places. Probable portage route is in red. Map prepared by author from Google Earth

The distance of the trail from the Rideau to Baker's Bay is 6.38 km (3.7 miles), basically in a straight line between the Rideau and Baker's Bay. The trail branches near its western end, with one end above the Deschenes rapids and the other below. The trail length from the Rideau River to the landing at the head of the Deschenes rapids would have been 8.0 kilometres.

Today, there is no physical evidence of the trail, and even the original alignment of the road between the Rideau River and Britannia Bay has disappeared.

Some readers may point out that the location of this trail does not align with a stone marker found in the Pinecrest Cemetery bearing the inscription "The old Indian Trail between Black Rapids and Lake Deschenes". This marker almost assuredly lies on the line of a different trail in the early 1800s, one from Black Rapids on the Rideau River to Lac Deschenes and which would lie to the south of the trail described in this analysis.

[1] "A Personal Letter from Chief Justice F.R. Latchford (The Supreme Court of Ontario) to Hamnett P. Hill about the Indian Trail between the Rideau and Ottawa Rivers, February 8th, 1938." Hill Collection, Library and Archives Canada, MG 24, I9, Vol. 12, pp. 3676 -77.
[2] "Old Indian Trail Existed from Hog's Back – Britannia Pre-Settlement Days – Nepean"; Ottawa Citizen, 16 July 1927
[3] Taylor & Kennedy; Ottawa's Britannia, Britannia Historical Association, no date; p. 28
[4] Elliot, B.; The City Beyond – A History of Nepean, Birthplace of Canada's Capital, 1792 – 1990; City of Nepean, 1991; p. 18