

## *Walking into Wilderness: The Toronto Carrying Place and Nine Mile Portage* By Heather Robertson

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selection of sketches, paintings, and photographs. Together they present a rich insight into land, society, culture, and the emerging senses of various places over some three

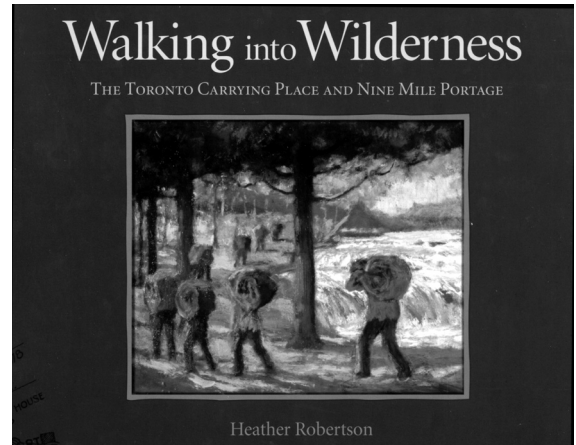
centuries of Canada's development.

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## *Walking into Wilderness: The Toronto Carrying Place and Nine Mile Portage*

By Heather Robertson. Winnipeg: Heartland Associates, Inc., 2010. 224 pages. \$29.95 softcover. ISBN 978-1-8961505-9-8 <[www.hrlandbooks.com](http://www.hrlandbooks.com)>

This is an invitation, not to walk into wilderness (that was done for us by many forerunners) but to savour various kinds of information that provide a context for the historic, near-mythic corridor of the title. The information spans a huge range from the primeval formation of the continents to the living memories of the destruction of parts of west Toronto by Hurricane Hazel in 1954. The invitation, in fact, is manifested in the Introduction when Robertson leads the reader to some significant places along the corridor: Baby Point near the Humber mouth, the high point of the Oak Ridges Moraine, Holland Marsh approaching Lake Simcoe, Fort Willow, and the Nottawasaga River at the north end. The large distances between these places are an indication that, despite a great deal of research, speculation and field investigation over many decades, there are still gaps in what can be confidently accepted as the actual route of the Carrying Place. The lower part of the Humber River watershed is heavily urbanized. The maps of the portage route are in large part a best approximation, at least until reaching the West Holland River on the way north through Lake Simcoe, Nine Mile Portage to restored Fort Willow, and the Nottawasaga River. The more general



maps require the reader to fill in detail, although the redrawing of Pilkington's map of Lieutenant-Governor Simcoe's circuit north in 1793, returning south on Yonge Street, is attractive and useful.

This is an entertaining account that, chapter by chapter, becomes more focused on the dramatic social interactions that impinge on the origins and reinforcement of the significantly-named Carrying Place and Nine Mile portage. It must have been an excessively onerous section of the trip to and from the upper Great Lakes, although this is not a preoccupation of the book. Rather, Robertson uses a broad canvas to sketch a series of captivating historical events and personalities, and human group interactions, from archeological evidence of prehistoric human occupancy of the region, to the elusive adventures of the young trailblazer Etienne Brulé, followed by the grandiose and often abortive plans of de la Salle in the second half of the seventeenth century, and the death-defying exploits of the trader Alexander Henry, nearly con-

temporaneous with the more secure commercial move of Jean Bonaventure Rousseaoux to the mouth of the Humber River. In the meantime, vicious internecine competition between various resident Amerindian groups had led to widely scattered warfare that also implicated Europeans at the raw edge between cultures. One major casualty was a group early touched by the French, the agriculturally-successful Huron or Wendat. They, along with their Jesuit missionaries, were virtually cleared from the region before the end of the seventeenth century by a powerful assault originating south of Lake Ontario.

Toward the end of the eighteenth century the importance of The Carrying Place rapidly faded as the traders and adventurers gave way to an invading phalanx concerned to secure order and ownership of land. Rousseaoux's role is superseded by the surveys, roads and fortresses of John Graves Simcoe, and Old World domesticity represented by his wife Elizabeth. Simcoe's tenure heralds a much more intense interest in the terrain of the portage, but for agricultural settlement rather than transit. The Humber River, under entrepreneurs like William Cooper, quickly developed as a power source and mill location. The outbreak of the War of 1812 raised interest temporarily in the portage to the north, and accounts of exciting conflicts particularly around Nottawasaga and the upper

lakes occupy the third last chapter. Many other personages appear before Robertson's account comes to an end, including Lord Selkirk and some of his disappointed settlers from Red River, fur trader Robert Livingston, the irascible William Lyon Mackenzie, and even Sir John Franklin. The resilient plan for a Georgian Bay Ship Canal along with The Carrying Place was paralleled and eclipsed by railways in the 1850s. The last highlight jumps ahead to the mid-twentieth century tragedy of the infamous hurricane.

These stories are very readable, but the book could benefit from a more persuasive and integrative theme. The Carrying Place does not quite do the job because its actual route and the physical considerations behind it remain ambiguous. The Nine Mile Portage is not similarly restricted. *Walking into Wilderness* is not footnoted but has a bibliographic essay that provides a good amount of detail. Before republishing, the volume should be checked for typographical errors, including some in captions. These memorable accounts related to the historic portage from the Toronto area to the upper lakes and the west could be especially meaningful for an inquisitive Ontarian, or even more so for a trail buff or canoeist who might try to follow it.

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### *Toronto's Visual Legacy: Official City Photography from 1856 to the Present*

Edited by Steve Mackinnon, Karen Teeple and Michele Dale. Toronto: James Lorimer and Company, 2009. 192 pages. \$34.95 softcover. ISBN 978-1-55277-437-3 <[www.lorimer.ca](http://www.lorimer.ca)>

**M**odern life is dominated by images intended not only to inform, but also to influence the viewer. *Toronto's Visual Legacy*, a selection of almost

200 photographs from more than 300,000 images created for the City of Toronto, demonstrates that such use of imagery is not restricted to modern times. Published