Welcome to the Tip to Tip Trail. This trail is an easy walk with a round trip length of four kilometres, taking about one hour to complete. Northern trail markers along the path go with the following texts. They highlight features along the trail that were either influenced by or important in the construction of the Rideau Canal. Please be sure not to disturb plants and wildlife you may encounter.

Step No. 1: A Changed Environment

The canal channel you are walking beside did not exist before the Rideau Canal was built. The channel was originally a natural depression in the riverbank, known locally as the “Ontario Stream”. Colonel By excavated the area around the day’s trail to build his residence. This was done to prevent water from the canal channel from entering the natural river course.

The eastern white cedar growing in the forest here is a true species well suited to this area of moist soils and limestone rock. It is typical of many wetland forest habitats along the canal.

Step No. 2: Surveying a New Land

Before the canal could be constructed, maps and surveys of the mode had to be made. Some of the forests along the route were so thick that standard surveying techniques of taking sightings and bearings could not be used. The surveys had to be done by eye on a high point of land and set on fire at night to take a bearing. This “tie-in” method was used to mark boundaries of crown lands along the canal. The broad arrow on the side was the department’s symbol. The Roman numerals on the top of the stone were used to identify their location on the Ordnance Department’s property maps.

Step No. 3: The Founding of Burritts Rapids

Welcome to the village of Burritts Rapids. It was first settled in 1759 by Colonel Stephen Burritt, a United Empire Loyalist from Vermont. After the American Revolution, many Loyalists fled the United States to Canada.

Many of the improvements and waterways along the Rideau and Catarack Rivers, Colonel Burritt was attracted to this site because of the water power from the rapids, which could be used to operate a sawmill.

When Colonel By surveyed the canal in 1806, there was actually a small village here.

Step No. 4: Bridges and Bridgemasters

The excavation of the canal channel made it necessary to build a bridge to accommodate both villages and feads. Several bridges have been built here since 1826. The present steel truss swing bridge was installed in 1887.

The bridge is opened to turning a canoe in the pent at the end of the bridge. Counterc weight and a set of iron wheels mounted on a circular track underneath allow the bridge to be swung open with little effort.

The library across the street was originally the bridgemaster’s home, and was used as the bridge office during the canal’s navigation seasons earlier in the century. Swinging the bridge is done by lock staff today.

Step No. 5: From Woodland to Wetland

To make a navigable waterway between Kingston and Ottawa, Colonel By had to raise water levels along the canal to flood out the rapids, waterfalls, and small areas of land. This in turn is an example of the variety of wetlands created along the Rideau Canal following construction.

Wetlands are important for many reasons. They provide habitats for many plants and animals. During periods of high water levels, wetlands act like giant sponges, holding water and helping to prevent flooding. They also filter out pollutants and sediments from the water. Because of the wetlands’ importance to the whole ecosystem, Parks Canada regulates and manages the Rideau Canal to help protect them.

Step No. 6: Controlling the River Flow

Most of the water for the Rideau Canal comes from a number of mainstem lakes. The flow of water from these lakes and along the canal is controlled by a series of weirs and dams. Like Colonel By over 170 years ago, Parks Canada manages the water levels along the canal by adjusting the number of step logs in the dams. These water levels are regulated to meet a wide variety of needs, from navigation and natural habitat conservation, to hydro-electric and municipal water supplies.

WARNING: DAMS CAN BE DANGEROUS. BE CAREFUL!

Step No. 7: The Tip

It took only six years to construct the Rideau Canal. The canal’s effect on the human and natural history of the surrounding area are irrevocable. It changed the natural environment. It passed through and altered the lives of the settlers who were already here. It brought new settlers and commerce into areas which had been nothing but forests and wild rivers. Railers here eagerly and try to imagine how this area must have looked over 170 years ago, before Colonel By’s men tamed rapids and drained the forest. Consider the feat Colonel By accomplished in building the Rideau Canal.

Illustrations: Brenda Carter, K. Jason Ryo

CAREFUL! DANGEROUS!