



## History: The Province Road

### The Historic Province Road

Alone, at the edge of a traffic island blanketed with frozen snow, sits a rock bearing a plaque. Situated opposite the entrance to the Mount Sunapee Ski Area it has long witnessed the change of seasons. It has stood for more than thirty years, unnoticed by most motorists who hastened by, preoccupied with their own destinations. If one were to find a convenient place to stop and walk close enough to the marker to read the inscription, one would discover a memorial to The Province Road placed by the Daughters of Colonial Wars in 1960. It reads: "The Province Road 1769 – Military Road 1754 – Scout Path 1743 – Penacook Trail."

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Of what significance was this road that someone thought it important enough to erect a plaque in its memory with tantalizing hints of its history? Where did it go and more challenging, what is left of it now? There are a few clues to be found along small stretches of area roads bearing the name Province Road, Old Province Road, or West Province Road, the latter being adjacent to the access road to the Mt. Sunapee ski area. Following the access, said to be a remnant of the original Province Road, one can find a double chairlift bearing the name, Province Double Chairlift, whose route roughly follows the direction of the Province Road. Beyond that however, one must rely on maps so old that many of the town names and boundaries are not as we know them today.

Imagine the land, which was to become the State of New Hampshire as it might have been 300 years ago, before early settlers had made significant advances into the interior countryside. A vast forested land, inhabited mainly by Native Americans who lived mostly along lakeshores and the two major waterways in the area, the Connecticut and the Merrimack Rivers, it was un-chartered country, devoid of roads. The Native Peoples concerned themselves with hunting, fishing, foraging and planting crops with little need to explore further unless their food supply became depleted. Initially, the only significant movement seems to have come from the occasional Iroquois raiders who would travel from

Lake Champlain, southward and then east to the Merrimack River to invade the Penacooks, thereby establishing a trail, which later became a scout path.

At the beginning of the 18th century, Portsmouth, a thriving seaport, was established as the provincial capital of the region and the growing population began moving further inland. About the same time, trading posts had begun to develop along the Connecticut River Valley, the furthestmost of which was Number 4, located where the center of Charlestown is now situated. The need for settlements at the western limits of the province to "communicate" with the so-called Metropolis, as Portsmouth was then termed, became increasingly necessary.

In December, 1742, Governor Benning Wentworth, recognizing this growing need for a road between the Connecticut River and the Merrimack, employed a surveying crew to begin laying out a route. Frequently deterred by Indian attacks, little was accomplished until about 1759, when Sir Jeffrey Amherst, Commander in Chief of His Majesty's Forces in North America, commanded some of his men to make a survey and mark trees in preparation for establishment of a road leading east from Charlestown, Number 4, to "Pennycook" on the Merrimack River.

The military men, already familiar with the established scouting path, followed its line. Eventually, a road was established which, according to an early map and various town records, traveled from Charlestown eastward through the towns of Acworth, Lempster, Unity and Goshen, a town formed in 1791 from sections of Newport and Sunapee. It then continued onward through Saville (Sunapee), around the southern end of Lake Sunapee through Fishersfield (Newbury), Perry (Sutton), Almsbury (Warner) . . . terminating in Boscawen.

**Records show that the old scouting trail officially became Province Road around the years of 1768-1772 and was so-named because it was the result of the actions of Governor John Wentworth and the provincial legislature, the only carriage road in western New Hampshire built through such a process.**

*This article consists of excerpts from "The Province Road" (SooNipi, Winter, 1999) by Jane White, and printed with permission from SooNipi Magazine, which shares the history of the region and tells of its special people and places in four publications a year.*

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