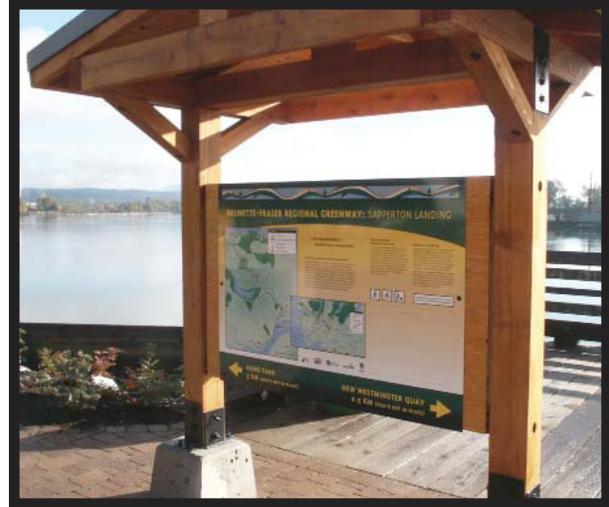


# SAPPERTON LANDING PARK



**IHP0623**  
**Established** 2001  
**Size** 8 acres  
**location** Cumberland Street & East Columbia Street  
**Ammenities**

- Picnic shelter
- Warph
- Fraser River views
- Queseat area

#### Ammenities

- Pools & streams
- Birds & wildlife
- Benches
- Natural vegetation

Despite its status of one of the city's newest parks, Sapperton Landing Park has ancient historical connections to the Stó:lô and to the founding of British Columbia.

This remarkable place was once a sublimely beautiful wilderness, home to the aboriginal Stó:lô (river) people who made this valley their home for thousands of years. The site of New Westminster is known to the Stó:lô as "Sxwaymelth," after a legendary warrior turned to stone by the transformer X̱ex̱a:ls. The "Sxwaymelth" stone was believed to contain the "shxweli" (life force) of the ancient ancestor warrior who gave this location great power. The stone, a First Nations landmark, was believed to have been located prominently on the New Westminster river bank near the present site of the railway bridge.

The Qw'ó:ntl'an (Kwantlen), which means noble or high born, was one of the ancient tribes of the Stó:lô claiming the site of New Westminster as its ancestral home. At the beginning of time the transformer is said to have turned the original people living here into wolves and sent them into the woods, giving this land to the Qw'ó:ntl'an.

The names of several village and food gathering locations illustrate the connection of the Stó:lô people to this land. On the lower banks of "Scuwiheya" (now Burnaby Lake and the Brunette River) was "Tsítslhes", a place for wind-drying fish. Nearby the large Qw'ó:ntl'an village of "Skwekwte'xwqen" (which became the site of the Royal Engineers Camp), and beside the Stótelô (Glen Brook) were places named "Statelew" and "Schechi:les" (strong lungs). It was here at this powerful location, on the high banks above the river, that the wooden boxes containing the bones of ancestors would be placed in trees and inside hollows under the roots of the maple trees.

Discovery of gold in British Columbia in 1857 forever changed the destiny of this place. When the news reached California the stampede of thousands of American gold miners began, in the spring of 1858. James Douglas, the old Hudson's Bay Company Factor and Governor of Vancouver Island, sent warnings to London fearing an American annexation of the territory. The correspondence was received by England's Colonial Secretary Sir Edward Bulwer-Lytton who had been at work in this new cabinet post for only three weeks. Lytton immediately introduced a bill creating the Colony of British Columbia on August 2, 1858 and appointed Douglas as Governor.

Alarmed by the threat posed by the possible American control of the Fraser River goldfields and the lack of British forces on the coast, Lytton decided that a corps of sappers and miners would be formed as the Columbia Detachment of Royal Engineers under the charge of Colonel Richard Clement Moody.

The first contingent of Royal Engineers arrived on October 29, 1858. Colonel Moody and his wife Mary, with four children, arrived in Victoria on Christmas Day, December 25, 1858. After a brief rest, Moody boarded the "Beaver" and steamed to British Columbia on January 5, 1859. Traveling up the main channel of the Fraser River, Moody was immediately struck at the perfection of a site at the fork of the river's delta as the location for a great city. He wrote in a letter to his friend Arthur Blackwood of the Colonial Office: "The entrance to the Fraser River is very striking. Extending miles to the right and to the left, are low marsh lands and yet from the background of superb mountains, Swiss in outline, dark in woods grandly towering into the clouds, there is a sublimity that deeply impresses you. Everything is large and magnificent! I scarcely ever enjoyed a scene so much in my life! ...In steaming up one fine reach at a spot 20 miles from the entrance to the channel of the Fraser, my attention was at once arrested by its fitness in all probability for a site of the first, if not the Chief Town, in the country. ...

It is a most important spot. It is positively marvelous how singularly it is formed for the site of a large town. It is not only convenient in every respect, but it is agreeable and striking in aspect. Viewed from the Gulf of Georgia across the meadow on entering the Frazer, the far distant giant mountains forming a dark background, the city would appear throned Queen-like and shining in the glory of the mid-day sun."

Colonel Moody directed the Sappers to land on the shore of his chosen site to survey for the capital city. It is likely that one of the first places they stepped ashore to begin building a new country was near the location of Sapperton Landing.

New Westminster began to emerge from the wilderness in the spring of 1859. The Columbia Detachment military camp was becoming a reality in the Sapper's town, which would become known later as Sapperton.

The work of clearing the site of the thick and dense forest of 200 foot tall trees was an enormous obstacle. There was much to do, and a sense of urgency pervaded the work in anticipation of the arrival of the 'Thames City,' sailing around Cape Horn with the largest contingent of the Columbia detachment yet.

Capt. Luard and 121 men, with 31 wives and 34 children stayed at the log barracks at Derby upon their arrival on April 12, 1859 until the completion of the self-contained sapper's camp. On June 27, 1859 they were joined by another contingent headed by Sgt. Rylatt and four men, six women and four children who arrived on a ship loaded with supplies.

The Sapper's camp became full of energy and spirit, alive with this small population. By the end of 1859 the camp was a self-contained village, with all of the Engineers barracks, a guardroom and cells, storehouses and a powder magazine completed. The following year all of the engineers had graduated from their canvas tents into barracks, and a fine "Government House" had been completed for Colonel Moody and his family overlooking the river.

The Sappers would not remain here for long. Despite the incredible work accomplished to establish the colony, the Gold Rush petered out quickly, and soon a depression and financial crisis replaced it. The Columbia Detachment was recalled in 1865, and the Sapper's Camp was soon dismantled, leaving only the Government House and the Royal Engineers Barracks to serve as legislative buildings. However, the city lost its status as the capital of the colony of B.C. in 1868, and most of the provincial bureaucrats left town for Victoria.

Confederation with Canada in 1871 rejuvenated the economy of the mainland and the old Sapper's Camp was transferred to the ownership of the federal government. The terms of Confederation earmarked federal funds to establish a penitentiary and a railway connection. New Westminster's convenient location on the mainland won it selection over Victoria, and the city also became the preferred location for the new provincial asylum. The site chosen for the two institutions was comprised of the former Royal Engineers Camp and the Queen's Ravine, one of the city's pleasure grounds. The completion of the penitentiary in 1877 and the asylum in 1878 brought tremendous economic benefit to the struggling city.

Excitement and anticipation greeted the arrival of the first train to Port Moody after the last spike ceremony on November 7, 1885. New Westminster's residents remained focused on securing their own branch line, which was inaugurated on April 22, 1886 with an auspicious sod-turning ceremony. Held on the waterfront in Sapperton near the site of today's park, the event was reported in the newspaper: "The day was fine ... and every elevated place in the immediate neighbourhood was occupied by those who were most anxious to witness the interesting ceremony. The branches of the old trees groaned under a load of spectators, and some of the Chinese ventured to go aloft, among the leaves. ... the artillery and rifles commanded by Captains Bole and Peele, preceded by the College Band and followed by Chief Bonson and members of the St. Andrew's Society in tartans, ... formed a hollow square round the spot chosen for the ceremony. ... Mr. James Leamy, the contractor, advanced with a gaily decorated spade and presented it to Mrs. Dickinson [the Mayor's wife] and she with a little effort but in the most graceful manner, turned over the first sod. A solemn silence ensued; everyone expected to hear something – a speech, a song, or a sermon. And sure enough they did hear something unusual. At the signal from Captain Bole the brass cannon thundered a salute. The ladies bounded like fawns; some of them cried 'Oh', one or two turned pale but did not faint, and two Chinamen who had been nestling in the leaves of a sycamore tree tumbled off the branches like ripe pears..."

By August, 1886 it was reported that the "whistle of the locomotive has at last been heard in our midst; the construction train with all its boarding and lodging establishment reached Laidlaw's wharf yesterday morning. The long line of Chinamen occupied in grading, the whites laying the rails and the locomotive Kamloops with the train of section cars had a great attraction for our citizens and large numbers gathered to witness the novel scene." The branch left the C.P.R. mainline at "Westminster Junction" in what would become the future municipality of Coquitlam. The line entered the city far away from the river, but upon crossing the Brunette River, followed the riverfront into the downtown parallel to Front Street. The station site was at the western end of Columbia at Douglas (Eighth) Street.

The city's colourful history is an important part of Sapperton Landing Park's character today. The mighty Fraser River, the railway, and the former Sapper's camp (now sporting condos instead of barracks) all contribute to its unique sense of place. The historic British Columbia Penitentiary Wharf Warehouse built in 1930-31 is a designated heritage building and has been preserved for future adaptive re-use.

This 800-metre long, three hectare regional park was a ten million dollar project created as part of the Millennium SkyTrain line by Translink in partnership with the City of New Westminster in 2000. The park is just one piece of a long-term plan to create a contiguous waterfront pathway along the entire city waterfront for walking and recreational cycling. A significant part of the park's design was the incorporation of a new tidal channel that will create new fish and bird habitat. Opportunities for picnic areas, boat launch, and fishing have also been created here.

## Behind the Name...Sapperton:



IHP0218

**There's only one Corps which is perfect - that's us;  
An' they call us Her Majesty's Engineers  
Her Majesty's Royal Engineers,  
With the rank and pay of a Sapper!**

Extract from the poem '**Sapper**' by Rudyard Kipling  
(1865-1936)

From medieval times to the 19<sup>th</sup> century, one of the prime functions of the engineers attached to field armies was to assist in siege warfare, by either building or destroying fortifications. The term 'Sapper' originates from the act of besieging the walls of a fortress, laying mines in zigzag trenches dug by hand to breach them. These trenches, or 'saps' (an old French word) were dug progressively deeper as they drew closer to the walls. The whole process was known as 'sapping,' and the persons digging them under the authority of the engineers were called 'Sappers.' The rank of 'Sapper' was conferred onto the private soldiers of the Corps of Royal Sappers and Miners on its amalgamation with the Corps of Royal Engineers in 1856.

In 1858, when the Colony of British Columbia was established and New Westminster was chosen as the capital city, the Columbia Detachment of Royal Engineers set up their camp in the eastern part of the city. Among the corps were many Sappers, or private soldiers. The camp became informally known as Sapperton for "Sappers' Town," and even after the disbanding of the corps this section of New Westminster retained this historic name.