

The Trailblazer

Throughout much of the 1850s, Britain's Pacific Northwest attracted little interest in the homeland. To those who had heard of the place, it was a remote, untamed wilderness of rock and timber where fur trader and Indian held sway. There was some truth to this image. New Caledonia, the mainland territory between the Rocky Mountains and the ocean, was part of the Hudson's Bay Company's commercial monopoly. Vancouver Island, although a Crown colony since 1849, was under a ten-year lease to the company on the unlikely condition that it promote settlement. The company's chief factor, James Douglas, doubled as colonial governor from his headquarters at Fort Victoria. The inhospitable if romantic image persisted, and there was little incentive for Britons to make the long voyage to this distant outpost of the empire. The land-hungry could find what they wanted with much less trouble in the United States.¹

The obscurity of the Pacific Northwest did not survive the decade. In fall 1857, prospectors from Washington and Oregon Territories found gold in the Fraser River. Within a few months, news of their discovery reached California, sparking off an influx of fortune seekers. Throughout 1858 they came, 30,000 in all, some striking it rich in sandbars near Fort Hope and Fort Yale.²

The gold rush captured the popular imagination not just in the United States but also in Britain. London *Times* correspondent Donald Fraser came north from San Francisco to witness the excitement first-hand, and his vivid accounts captivated readers in the homeland.³ Among the captivated was a young Englishman named Dewdney who was about to explore the career opportunities a worldwide empire offered the ambitious and adventuresome.

Edgar Dewdney was born on 5 November 1835 in Bideford, Devonshire. Although little is known of his parents, Charles Dewdney and Fanny Hollingshead, they were clearly people of means because they afforded

their son an education available only to the wealthier classes. The young Dewdney went to school in Bideford, Tiverton, and Exeter before going on to Cardiff to study for the profession of civil engineer.⁴ Tall and athletic, he loved sports and had that inexplicable fondness for cricket peculiar to the English and those colonized by them. Indeed, he was an accomplished player and once served on the South Wales team in a match against All England. The game would remain one of his abiding passions throughout his long life.⁵

Dewdney moved to London after completing his studies and worked for a year as private secretary to John Lorry Rickards, who had been in India during the mutiny of 1857. Rickards was a principal informant to Solicitor General Sir Fitzroy Kelly on that event, and Dewdney wrote out the information. India intrigued the young engineer, and for a while, he contemplated pursuing his career in that jewel in the imperial Crown. The empire offered exciting prospects to a man of his training; there were roads, railways, and bridges to be built, and fortunes and reputations to be made.⁶

At this time, the newspapers were filled with stories of the Fraser Valley gold rush, and Dewdney realized that he could do better for himself in this new land. He reasoned that it would take but ten years in a country paved with gold “to put together a competency” with a view to returning to England and a life of gentlemanly leisure. Already acquainted with the political scene in London, he secured, through Charles Kemeys-Tynte, MP for Bridgewater, an introduction to Colonial Secretary Edward Bulwer Lytton.⁷

Lytton was the first occupant of the Colonial Office to take an active interest in the Pacific Northwest. Using the gold frenzy of 1858 as an excuse, he cancelled the Hudson’s Bay Company’s control of the mainland, turning it into the Crown colony of British Columbia. To discourage American annexationist designs, he sent out a detachment of 165 Royal Engineers under Colonel Richard Clement Moody; they were to build roads and fortifications and maintain a military presence. And he handpicked key officials for the new colony, the most notable of whom was Matthew Baillie Begbie, a Cambridge graduate, who became chief justice.⁸ Begbie was to personify British law and order in the gold fields.⁹

It is not surprising that Lytton encouraged Dewdney in his plans to seek his fortune on the banks of the Fraser. He offered the engineer no official appointment, however, but rather a letter of introduction to James Douglas, governor of the two colonies of Vancouver Island and British Columbia.¹⁰

And so, armed with this letter and with £150 in his pocket, Dewdney set sail on 5 March 1859 to embark on a new life. Travelling on a steamer of the

Hamburg mail line, he arrived in New York on 20 March after a stormy passage. There, he lingered for two weeks, squandering most of his money on high living. The spendthrift inclinations that were to plague him throughout his career were already causing him trouble. But, as he put it, “with a strong constitution, lots of confidence in myself . . . I proceeded on to my destination with a light heart.” The remainder of his journey was by sea to Panama, across the isthmus by train, and from there again by sea to Victoria, where he arrived on 13 May.¹¹

Victoria had few attractions or amenities in 1859. The old company fort still stood guard over the harbour. A few stone structures on the waterfront hinted at prosperity, but most buildings were of crude timbers and hastily constructed, a legacy of the excitement of the previous summer. Streets were quagmires of mud, and sanitation was rudimentary.¹² The rough-and-ready shape of the island capital was typical of settler outposts in both colonies at the time. Few newcomers had put down sufficiently deep roots to improve their properties, and many had little intention of staying. Most of the gold miners had given up on the Fraser by now and had returned home. But about 5,000 of them remained, determined to try their luck elsewhere in the interior.¹³ They comprised by far the largest element in the non-Native population and were the most transient. The British-born – officials, soldiers, missionaries, Hudson’s Bay Company personnel, and the like – numbered around 1,000 but constituted a political and social elite. The Natives, declining in numbers because of disease, were estimated at around 30,000 and were increasingly resentful at the intrusions on their domains.

These intrusions were not about to end, for the new arrivals sought ways and means of exploiting the land to best advantage. In spite of challenging topography and poor communications, the possibilities were enormous, and Dewdney had no reason to be disappointed with his chosen destination. Gold mining was the most lucrative enterprise and would remain so for at least a decade, but a man needed luck to succeed. Servicing the miners was probably a more certain way of doing well. There was money to be made also in the fur trade and in lumbering. Sawmills were springing up to provide building materials for new and expanding communities. Agriculture had never been one of the great attractions of the colonies, but some tried their hands at it after arrival. By 1859, farms had spread north from Victoria to the Cowichan Valley.¹⁴ There were opportunities, too, in government service – in fact, there was no shortage of activities a young energetic immigrant with the right connections could turn his hand to.

Anxious to make a good impression, Dewdney donned his best clothes – frock coat and tall hat – before calling on Governor Douglas. The old fur

trader examined the letter from Lytton, and on learning that his visitor was a civil engineer, suggested he approach Colonel Moody, commander of the Royal Engineers and commissioner of lands and works for British Columbia. Dewdney explained to the colonel that he was virtually broke and needed immediate employment. Moody, who was about to leave next day for the mainland to lay out the site of its capital city, invited him along as head of the civilian surveying team working on the project.¹⁵

Elated, Dewdney returned to his quarters. He was staying at the Cushing Hotel, a flimsy structure thrown up to accommodate the gold miners and a lively spot after sundown. He hardly slept that night, his bedroom being directly above the saloon where he could see the revellers through cracks in the floor.

The next morning he was up early, packed away his good clothes, and put on an old velveteen shooting coat, corduroy pants, and a fur cap. Thus attired, he went on board *The Beaver*, the Hudson's Bay Company steamer that was to take them to the mainland. Before long, Colonel Moody and his family arrived, followed by Governor Douglas who came to say farewell. Douglas, with an oblique reference to the change of clothing, remarked: "Good morning, Mr. Dewdney. Glad to see you prepared for work. Hope to hear great things of you."¹⁶ Dewdney was already somewhat in awe of the governor whom he later described as "a man of splendid presence," although "rather pompous."¹⁷

The Beaver slipped away from the wharf at eight in the morning amid cheers from the assembled well-wishers and a salvo from the Fort Victoria cannon. The crossing was slow, and they reached their destination at ten at night, deep in the Fraser delta where the north arm branches off the river. There, on the right bank for strategic reasons, Moody had chosen the site of the new capital city which he named Queensborough. A few months later, at the suggestion of Queen Victoria, the city was renamed New Westminster.

The site was covered with magnificent trees – fir, cedar, hemlock, spruce – and the surveyors, civilian and military, worked hard to clear them.¹⁸ Dewdney's contract lasted from 18 May to 20 June when Moody cancelled it in order to hire a former Royal Engineer who had recently arrived in the colony.¹⁹ Although now out of work, Dewdney was pleased with the pay – \$250 in American gold coins – American and British money being used interchangeably in the colony.²⁰

While carving New Westminster out of the forest, Dewdney met an old friend named Lee whom he had not seen since 1858 when they had lived in the same boarding house on Northumberland Avenue in London for a few months. Lee now proposed that they go into business together cutting

hay on Sea Island near the mouth of the Fraser which he had already explored. Dewdney mentioned the idea to Moody who offered them \$100 per ton for up to 100 tons. (Moody had many mules and horses to winter.) Neither Englishman knew much about farming, and so they teamed up with a Canadian, Silas Brouse, who was experienced in the matter and whom Dewdney had met on the voyage from New York.

Using Dewdney's money, they purchased food and farming equipment and set up camp on the island. Weeks of hard work followed while Dewdney learned with some difficulty the art of swinging a scythe. The mosquitoes were relentless, and he began to think that haymaking at \$100 per ton was not the bargain it appeared to be when he had made his initial investment. In the end, the venture came to naught, because the nine or ten tons that they harvested had to be used to pay off debts. Dewdney was back where he started: broke.²¹

While busy with his haymaking venture, Dewdney first came into contact with the Native Indians of the region. The Musqueam and Squamish peoples were active in the Fraser delta and made occasional visits to his camp on Sea Island. He described them as "very saucy and independent," and he was clearly annoyed when once they helped themselves to a pot of beans from his campfire. Reports that they were implicated in "various murders and piratical excursions" against prospectors en route to the diggings gave him further cause for concern.

The Indians, of course, were only defending their territory from the invaders, but few newcomers could see it this way. Dewdney was not easily intimidated and fear of attack never stood in his way. Indeed, he loved to tell the story of how he participated in the hunt for a Squamish "desperado," John Chinaman, so named because of his oriental appearance. Another story with which he regaled listeners for years to come concerned his role in the capture of Silpaynim, a Musqueam who was wanted for "a number of desperate acts." In this case, Dewdney physically overpowered the Indian after luring him from the forest with a bottle of whiskey while talking the Chinook jargon.²² These early encounters gave him a poor impression of Natives and his unsympathetic views hardened with time. Although he came to depend on them as packers and guides during his years of prospecting and road building in British Columbia, he resented the Natives' lack of subservience and their insistence on being paid decent wages for their labour. His attitude reflected all too well the colonizing mentality that regarded Aboriginal inhabitants as a regrettable nuisance.

During 1959, the gold excitement was moving north along the Fraser, beyond Lytton and into the Cariboo. A year later, the fortune hunters were exploring the country east of Quesnel where fabulous strikes were to be

made. Meanwhile, others were trying their luck with encouraging results in the Similkameen Valley, on the eastern side of the Cascade Mountains.

The roving Judge Begbie was the key to law and order in the shifting eldorados that were opening up the colony at a fast pace. He was assisted by local gold commissioners who were stipendiary magistrates with the power to settle claim disputes. Most commissioners were new arrivals who had been recommended by Colonial Secretary Lytton, and many of them were Irishmen of the Dublin Castle persuasion.²³ Peter O'Reilly, the gold commissioner at Hope, was typical, and he became a lifelong friend of Dewdney.

Roads were virtually non-existent in the colony, and the expanding mining frontier demanded that they be built, if only to keep the auxiliary trade (outfitting and so forth) in the hands of local merchants. Government-sponsored road and trail construction provided Dewdney with some lucrative contracts in the 1860s and cultivated his reputation as pioneer pathfinder. In January 1860, he hiked in difficult weather from Hope to Similkameen and back over an old foot trail, reporting to Peter O'Reilly on conditions in the gold fields and on the importance of keeping the trail open to supply the influx of miners expected in the spring.²⁴ He was hoping for a contract to improve the trail to accommodate pack mules; he got it, but later in the summer.

Meanwhile, he set himself up in business as a land agent and auctioneer in New Westminster. He secured a few contracts from his old acquaintance, Colonel Moody, to sell town lots and to lay out the plans for government buildings that were in the course of construction. In May, Moody made him official surveyor of the fledgling capital, but the job proved inadequate to his financial ambitions. In July, Dewdney was auctioning off town lots in Hope and was about to embark on his first road-building project. In partnership with Walter Moberly, a Canadian, he had the contract to improve the Hope-Similkameen trail to accommodate mules.²⁵

Dewdney and Moberly laboured throughout the fall until November when a dispute arose over the route they were taking and Moody's reluctance to advance them cash to pay their workers.²⁶ The partners abandoned the project, and Dewdney was soon back in New Westminster trying his hand once more as an auctioneer. This time, he was selling seven-year leases to waterfront property on Columbia Street, and with his friend Moberly, he retained two of the leases as a personal investment.²⁷ This venture was his debut in real estate speculation, a route to elusive riches he would explore repeatedly in the years to come.

At this time, Adam Beaur, a Canadian, hit pay dirt at Rock Creek, about 100 miles east of the Similkameen diggings. This find gave a renewed

significance to the Hope Mountain trail. Governor Douglas, with the interests of Victoria and New Westminster merchants in mind, resolved to extend the mule trail to Rock Creek and to improve a section of it to carry wagons.²⁸

Dewdney and Moberly won the contract to build the wagon road in January 1861, and the work kept them busy until the summer. The contract called for a road twelve feet wide with bypasses of sixteen feet every 200 yards. All creeks and rivers were to be bridged, and the grade was not to exceed one foot in twelve.²⁹ With payment at £300 per mile, the road was an expensive undertaking, and the government called a halt when only twenty-five miles had been built out of Hope. In any event, the Similkameen and Rock Creek gold fields were not as lucrative as expected, and the miners were already hurrying off to the Cariboo, inspired by tales of fabulous strikes.³⁰

Over the 1860-1 winter, prospectors found gold in the gravel of Williams Creek, causing a stampede into the area. It became the centre of the Cariboo gold rush and the site of the fabled Barkerville. So rich were the strikes on Williams Creek and adjacent streams that Governor Douglas embarked on an ambitious road-building scheme into the area, borrowing huge sums of money to do so. For much of 1862, Royal Engineers and civilian contractors were busy building the Cariboo Road, blasting rock faces, and constructing elaborate cribbing supports in difficult sections through the Fraser Canyon. By 1863, travellers could take a four-horse stagecoach from Yale to Soda Creek, catch a steamer to Quesnel, and carry on to Barkerville by trail.³¹ Dewdney was one of the civilians who worked on this project. In partnership with Moberly, he got the contract to build the section from Lytton to Cook and Kimball's Ferry on the Thompson in February 1862.³² With this done, he went off to see the excitement at Williams Creek for himself, spending the summers of 1862 and 1863 in the area and the winter in between in Victoria and Hope.

Dewdney's reputation as a surveyor preceded him to the Cariboo, and he readily found work there marking out the boundaries between claims. Because many of these claims were immensely valuable, the boundaries had to be clearly identified, and he was able to charge handsome fees for his services. One of the disputed claims he surveyed was a celebrated one. Henry Fuller Davis discovered that the adjoining claims of Isaiah Diller and Joel Abbott covered 212 feet rather than the specified 200, that is, 100 feet per claim. He staked the twelve-foot strip for himself and took \$15,000 in gold from this sliver of land before selling it to another. This exploit earned him the name "Twelve-Foot Davis," although he was short in stature. Davis went on to establish himself as a fur trader in the Peace River country.³³

By 1864, Dewdney had been six years in British Columbia, and the fortune he had sought was still nowhere in sight. He had made lots of money but had spent lots too. Work in fact had been spasmodic, even seasonal, and the cost of living high. Even so, he retained his faith in the country and in himself. Optimistic by nature, he was not easily discouraged, and he could see all around him that men were doing well in speculation and in business. He had a further reason not to give up, a personal motivation that ultimately convinced him to make his life in this new land; a romantic attachment was more and more at the centre of his thoughts.

In August 1860, while on the river steamer *Reliance* between New Westminster and Hope, the captain introduced him to the other passengers. Very soon, Dewdney was on good terms with one of them, Thomas Glennie, a Scot who was planning to homestead near Hope. Glennie had just arrived in the colony from Britain and was accompanied by his wife, Susan Louisa Moir, and her two daughters from a previous marriage, Jane, aged 17, and Susan, who was about to turn 15. The girls had been born in Ceylon where their father had been joint owner of a tea plantation before his sudden death in 1849. Dewdney took an immediate fancy to Jane who was described as “lovely and dainty in every way.”³⁴ It was a most fortunate encounter for him because eligible non-Native women were in extremely short supply in both colonies. Glennie built a substantial house for his family on the 160 acres he pre-empted along the Coquihalla River, two miles from Hope. The Glennies were settled in by Christmas 1860, and a month later, some household effects they had sent around Cape Horn, including Jane’s rosewood piano, were delivered to the door. By then, the family was actively involved in Hope’s lively social scene – parties and dances at the company fort, horse races, and the like. Dewdney would always be found at such events, unless he was away road building, never losing a chance to spend time with Jane.³⁵

As early as 1862, some of their mutual friends in the community were even laying bets that the two would be married before long.³⁶ But it was not until 25 March 1864 when Ned and Jeannie, as they called one another, tied the knot at the Anglican Christ Church in Hope. The wedding party included Jane’s sister, Susan, her mother, her stepfather, and Peter O’Reilly, who had left Hope in 1862 but returned for the occasion. The ceremony was followed by lunch at the Hudson’s Bay Company fort, hosted by William Charles, the chief trader, and his wife, Mary Ann. After lunch, the bride and groom boarded the *Reliance* en route to New Westminster, retracing the journey on which they had first met less than four years previously.³⁷

For several more years, Dewdney’s career pattern was as before: contractual work of varying complexity and remuneration that often kept him

away from home for long stretches at a time. Some of the jobs seem unchallenging at first glance, but they invariably involved travel over difficult terrain, sometimes in appalling weather. His assignment to inspect a bridge built by Thomas Spence at the confluence of the Thompson and Nicola Rivers is a case in point.

In March 1865, Dewdney set out from New Westminster, where he and Jane had a house, planning to go by canoe as far as Yale. Five other men, who were also en route up the Fraser, accompanied him. The group included David Oppenheimer, a fellow contractor and land speculator who would do well for himself in the Vancouver real estate boom in later years and become mayor of the city. The river was choked with ice, however, and they only made it to Matsqui Island when they were forced to return to New Westminster. Ten days later, when the ice had cleared, they were able to proceed once more. The winter had been a severe one, and progress on foot along the road north of Yale was hampered by heavy snowfalls and slides. At Jackass Mountain, the road was blocked completely, and they had to cross the fallen snow by cutting footholds in it while perching over the precipice of the canyon.

One night, when they were staying at Chapman's Bar wayside house, they were awakened by two Indians knocking excitedly at the door. The Indians reported that they had been escorting Ned Wadham, his wife, and a bag of gold dust worth over \$25,000 belonging to a merchant named Beede down the canyon when they had been carried away by a snow slide. They had managed to save themselves, the wife, and the gold, but Wadham had been lost, presumably ending up in the river. The next morning, Dewdney and his party visited the nearby cabin of Pat Ryan, the road foreman, where Mrs. Wadham had spent the night after her harrowing escape. To their surprise, they found her husband there, too, alive and well. Ryan and his men had searched the snow slide for much of the night, digging here and there until they had found Wadham just beneath the surface. Many years later, when he was living in Ottawa, Dewdney loved to tell of this miraculous escape. His listeners were often incredulous, but one day Wadham himself turned up in the national capital as part of a British Columbian delegation, and he was able to confirm this story.³⁸ Dewdney did eventually get to Spence's Bridge, checked it out, and pronounced it fit for public traffic.³⁹ The bridge was a substantial structure and lasted until 1894, when it was swept away by flood waters.

Meanwhile, the political landscape of the colony was changing, and new gold discoveries continued to force the pace of exploration, road building, and settlement. James Douglas retired early in 1864 and was succeeded by two governors: Arthur Kennedy on Vancouver Island and Frederick

Seymour in British Columbia. Seymour was a thin, bald, card-playing bachelor who took an active interest in the development of the mainland colony. Shortly after establishing himself in New Westminster, he visited Barkerville and the surrounding gold fields, travelling along the Cariboo Road.⁴⁰

During the governor's absence, reports arrived in the capital of a rich gold strike at Wild Horse Creek, a tributary of the Kootenay River in the far southeast of the colony. The discovery was the work of American miners who had crossed over from Montana. Supplies were coming in from the United States – the easiest route, given the contours of the land – and once again, British Columbia merchants feared they might be excluded from a potentially lucrative trade. Those who tried to transport goods through American territory ran into trouble with customs officials. Seymour came to their rescue by actively seeking out an all-British route to the new eldorado.

In fall 1864, the governor sent out an expedition under George Turner which went by way of Lytton, Kamloops, Shuswap Lake, and the Columbia River but failed to reach the Kootenay country as a result of lack of provisions. Around the same time, another party led by J.J. Jenkins set out from Hope and made it to the Kootenay River travelling via Princeton, Osoyoos Lake, Kettle River, Columbia River, and St. Mary's River, reporting that a trail was possible just north of the boundary. Seymour decided on this route, and money was put in the estimates for that purpose.⁴¹

When Dewdney arrived back from Spence's Bridge at the beginning of April 1865, Seymour told him that he had been recommended by Peter O'Reilly as the man to build the pack trail to Wild Horse Creek. He wanted it done by September. Dewdney knew nothing of the country beyond Similkameen, but he agreed to take on the job if he could choose his own men and could be assured of enough money to pay them as the work progressed. That was fine with the governor.⁴²

In 1863, Britain had withdrawn the Royal Engineers from the colony, but most of the sappers and NCOs had decided to take their discharge and the offer of free land in British Columbia. Dewdney greatly admired these men, and it was former engineers that he chose as his team, including his assistant, George Turner.⁴³

When the survey team reached Hope, Dewdney hired eighteen Indians, men and women, to pack their supplies over the mountains to Similkameen. The trip over the old road that he had built in 1860 was slow but pleasant. As they approached the upper altitudes, they encountered snow and the Indians helped them make snowshoes, which they called bears' feet, out of vine maple and rawhide. This trip brought back happy memories for the trailblazer, and he was almost poetic in recounting the experience many

years later: "I shall never forget what pleasure and enjoyment I had when walking over the frozen summits on a bright, sunshiny, early morning, the sun dazzling in the snow, which seemed studded with millions of diamonds, and the air bracing and seeming to give fresh life with every breath you drew."⁴⁴ They arrived at the Similkameen Valley after about ten days of travel. There, they paid off their packers who returned to Hope. Dewdney observed that the older Indians had been just as good at the arduous work as the younger ones. One couple, Polalee and his wife, both of whom were around sixty years old, were among the best. Polalee's wife, for instance, had carried a barrel of sugar weighing 125 lbs. over the mountains.

The Similkameen had fine potential as cattle country, with thick bunch grass all over the ranges. Yet few settlers had made their homes there at the time. One of the pioneers was John F. Allison, who had established a ranch at Princeton. Allison provided the party with a dozen horses which they used to pack their supplies down the valley. En route, they met Angus McDonald on his way to Hope. McDonald was in charge of Fort Colville, a Hudson's Bay Company post located south of the forty-ninth parallel, and he knew the country well. He advised the party that the road ahead was rough and that they should keep their eyes fixed on a couple of snow-capped peaks barely discernible in the distance – part of the Selkirk Mountains, as it turned out.

The surveyors pushed on, crossing a small range and Osoyoos Lake, over more mountains and into the Kettle River Valley. By this time, the horses had outlived their usefulness, and they were abandoned in the valley. With the beasts sent out to pasture, Dewdney hired Indians to pack their equipment for the remainder of the journey. He now split his party in two, sending one group down the valley with instructions to rendezvous with him at Fort Sheppard, a Hudson's Bay post on the Columbia. Along with three Indians and two whites, he headed off across the next mountain range and emerged at Lower Arrow Lake. Hiring a canoe from local Indians, they made their way down the Columbia to Fort Sheppard, arriving on 27 May. Dewdney realized that the route he had taken was impractical. Fortunately, however, the men who had taken a more southerly route from Kettle River, and who were already at the fort before him, reported that a trail was possible the way they had come.

Indians were playing key roles in these explorations, but Dewdney was annoyed that some of them refused to travel beyond their own locality, forcing him to re-hire at different points. He remained irritated by their sense of independence and by their insistence on charging what he considered exorbitant rates for their services.⁴⁵ Even so, he knew that he could not do without them, and they clearly were aware of this fact.

At this point, he decided to leave his men at Fort Sheppard while he explored the Kootenay River from its junction with the Columbia to Kootenay Lake, with some thought of finding a way from the lake through to St. Mary's River. Engaging the services of "a couple of good Indians," he set out in a birchbark canoe, a mode of transport he greatly admired. The trip up the Kootenay was rough going, requiring fourteen portages around rapids and falls. They crossed the lake to what is now known as Crawford Bay and went partly up the valley towards St. Mary's River. But Dewdney came to the conclusion that the ferry across the lake would be too long and, as such, objectionable to packers. The route just would not work, and he returned to Fort Sheppard with his companions, running most of the Kootenay rapids in the canoe.

Because some definite decisions had already been made concerning the Kettle Valley – Fort Sheppard section, he instructed most of his men to retrace their steps westwards from the fort, blazing the line as they did so. He continued eastwards, following the Pend Oreille River, accompanied by an Indian named Peter and a former Royal Engineer called Howell. They crossed the mountains and came out at Kootenay Flats near where Creston now stands. The Indians there were friendly, and one was engaged as packer, another as guide. With this help, the party carried on along the Goat River Valley, skirting the southern edge of the Purcell Mountains. Upon reaching the Moyie River, the going was easy all the way to Wild Horse Creek. A well-tramped trail up the valley was the principal supply route in from Idaho.

In early June, Dewdney arrived at the gold diggings. Several hundred claims had been staked, rockers and sluices were in full swing, and some of the miners were making well over \$100 per day from the creek bed. American merchants had cornered the market in food and other necessities and were selling beef, flour, eggs, tobacco, and so forth at astronomical prices.⁴⁶ This was the trade coveted by the Victoria and New Westminster merchants, and the planned trail was supposed to divert it into their pockets.

Peter O'Reilly was already on the spot, keeping an eye on things in his role as gold commissioner. On his recommendation, Dewdney hired William Fernie, "an active young man," as his foreman.⁴⁷ He also engaged sixty-five men, mainly from the ranks of disappointed miners, as his work crew. Fernie and Howell were put in charge of trail construction from Wild Horse to Kootenay Flats, and an American merchant was contracted to create a supply depot at the latter place to serve their needs.

With these arrangements in place, Dewdney set out for Fort Sheppard accompanied by Louis, a Metis packer, who was carrying enough food to get them to Kootenay Flats. Upon their arrival, they were shocked to

discover that the local Indians, who were minding a food cache sent in from Fort Sheppard, were nowhere to be seen. They spent a couple of anxious days and nights assailed by hunger and relentless thunderstorms. At last, they found the Indians, who had moved camp to avoid being pestered by mosquitoes. Their food cache was untouched, and Dewdney was delighted when he reached inside a flour sack to find a bottle of brandy sent surreptitiously by his friends at the fort. He returned to the fort by canoe via the Kootenay River, shooting the rapids once more along the way.

Fort Sheppard became his centre of operations. It was about halfway along the chosen route and had easy access to Fort Colville, a major Hudson's Bay Company post from which supplies could be had. He began to hire work crews to build the trail in various sections east and west of the Columbia, and he arranged for the creation of supply depots along the way. Chinese workers built the section just west of Fort Sheppard. A substantial Chinese population lived in the colony, many of them working in the gold fields, especially in sites abandoned by whites.

As the work progressed, Dewdney travelled back and forth along the line ensuring that all was going well and that supplies were in place. By the end of the summer, the trail was almost complete, and he paid a final visit to Wild Horse Creek. There, O'Reilly advanced him \$25,000, mainly in gold dust, and he set off along the trail on horseback, paying the work crews as he went. At Kootenay Flats, he met Judge Begbie en route to Wild Horse to hold the assizes.

By mid-September, trains of pack mules and horses were able to go from Hope to the Kootenay gold fields along a trail entirely in British Columbia territory. Dewdney returned to New Westminster where he settled his accounts with the colony's treasury department. The entire bill came to \$74,000, and not one item of expenditure was questioned. Indeed, Governor Seymour complimented Dewdney for the efficiency with which he had done the work.

The Dewdney Trail, as the route to the gold fields became known, was a four-foot-wide, meandering serpentine highway that hugged the American border while passing through some of British Columbia's most rugged and spectacular scenic terrain.⁴⁸ It was Dewdney's greatest achievement to date and secured his reputation as one of the colony's pioneer pathfinders. And the prominence thus acquired paved the way for his later entry into politics.

The 1865-6 winter was harsh in the interior, and when the snows melted in spring, the gold at Wild Horse seemed to vanish along with it. The diggings proved to be shallower than first imagined, and the miners moved on, mostly to Big Bend, northwards along the Columbia River.⁴⁹

The trail never had a chance to profit the colony as intended. The eastern section fell into disuse, but the western half became an important route into the interior valleys for settlers and cattle drovers in the years ahead.⁵⁰

The gold excitement continued to spring up in unexpected places, and Governor Seymour persisted with his policy of blazing trails into the diggings. There was no shortage of contracts for Dewdney. In March 1866, he worked at Lillooet, reporting on the shape of roads. He was also about to build a trail up the Bridge River to Tyaughton Creek where men had found the yellow metal.⁵¹ A little later, he was busy on another trail, this time from Cache Creek to Savona on Kamloops Lake.⁵² This trail was part of the governor's plan to create a route via the Thompson River to the Big Bend gold fields.⁵³ While in the area, Dewdney surveyed reserves around Kamloops, giving the Indians not what they wanted, but grazing land that he considered more suitable for their purposes.⁵⁴ In this matter, his thinking mirrored that of the authorities in the colony's capital. There were no Indian treaties in British Columbia and, consequently, no land entitlements. In assigning reserves, government officials usually acted in an arbitrary manner, keeping settler interests at the forefront.

Throughout Dewdney's travels, Jane was living alone in New Westminster. Her husband considered the interior far too rough for her sensibilities. Shortly after they had wed, her stepfather, Thomas Glennie, disappeared, leaving his family homeless and broke. He had never made a go of the homestead, and he turned out to be a spendthrift and ne'er-do-well. In 1865, Jane invited her mother, Louisa, and younger sister, Susan, to live with her in New Westminster. They agreed and quickly entered into the lively social activities of a very "agreeable community." Dewdney's brother Walter and two of their sisters, Charlotte and Fanny, came to British Columbia around this time and also settled in New Westminster.⁵⁵

Dewdney's work had kept him constantly on the move over the years, which was less than satisfactory to his wife. In 1867, with a more sedentary life in mind, he purchased land at Soda Creek. He built a house, made some improvements, and tried his hand at cattle ranching.⁵⁶ He was not alone. All along the road to the Cariboo, ranches were being marked out in the semi-arid grasslands, often by Americans investing their profits from the gold fields.

Meanwhile, Louisa and Susan returned to Hope where they opened a school. A couple of times each year, John Allison passed through town, driving cattle from his Similkameen Valley ranch en route to markets in New Westminster. On one trip, Allison was introduced to Susan. He was twenty years older than she, but their friendship blossomed into romance, a development noticed by Ned and Jane when they came down from Soda

Creek for a visit in June 1868. The Dewdneys were present when Allison married Susan at the Hope parsonage on 3 September that same year. Two hours after the ceremony, the newlyweds set out on horseback over the Dewdney Trail for Similkameen, she perched on a sidesaddle.⁵⁷

The cattle business was too slow for Dewdney's restless energy and ambitions. The government occasionally sent surveying contracts his way, which he accepted.⁵⁸ And he kept an eye on gold-mining developments for that elusive opportunity to strike it rich.⁵⁹

There was no shortage of prospectors to expand the frontiers of exploration. Those who had been disappointed at Barkerville, Wild Horse Creek, or Big Bend were always willing to try their luck elsewhere. Some pushed north beyond Fort George into the Peace River area, and before long, reports that the area was good gold-bearing country began to filter out.

In spring 1869, Dewdney got together a syndicate of Soda Creek ranchers and businessmen to send a prospecting party into Peace River. The partners subscribed a total of \$1,200, and the colony's governor, now Anthony Musgrave, contributed \$1,000 from public funds. They outfitted fourteen men and sent them north early in the season. Nothing was heard all summer long. In October, the prospectors turned up in Quesnel and admitted to finding promising diggings at Vital Creek near Tatla Lake. News got out, and there was a stampede into the area. Nothing came of it, however; the creek held little enough of the precious metal.⁶⁰

Dewdney had spent a decade in the Pacific colony and had little to show for it in the form that mattered most to him: material wealth. His pattern of migratory contract work was not unusual at the time. Frontier conditions dictated that more people were engaged in seasonal or occasional labour associated with resource exploitation and the construction of towns and transportation infrastructures rather than in agriculture, which was only slowly establishing itself. It was a familiar career path in a community of strangers where few had put down roots and where tradition and concepts of social cohesion were almost entirely absent, save for bonds of common class or ethnic origin.

He had experienced British Columbia in its most romantic transitional phase as it went from a trading colony in the hands of an archetypal concessionary company to a settlement colony invaded by gold diggers and adventurers. Presiding over these dramatic changes was a nervous imperial bureaucracy. In asserting its authority over the rapidly expanding frontier, the administration sought to direct social evolution along an orderly path, ensuring that economic exploitation was conducted according to rules that minimized investor risk.⁶¹ Familiar structures of law and authority – Judge Begbie, the gold commissioners, the Royal Engineers, and the like –

inspired confidence while constraining the freebooting adventurism associated with the frontier in the republic to the south. In an important sense, Dewdney's trail, his most notable achievement to date, represented more than a conduit of trade to the advantage of New Westminster merchants; it was also a line of contact to a remote corner of the colony so that the state could assert its control. The trail, and others like it, were essential arteries of communication, confronting the challenges of geography and ensuring that localities did not develop their own peculiar institutions. In this manner, the trailblazer made his own contribution to stabilizing the colonial state. He was soon to play a more direct role in its evolution.