

The waterways of Whonnock

The hilly parts of east Maple Ridge are blessed with a maze of creeks and streams.

Some streams flow all year and others are reduced to just a trickle or dry up in summer.

In the rainy season, they together carry down mighty volumes of water that ultimately end up in the Fraser River.

It surprised me to learn a few years ago that natural features, including rivers, creeks and streams, are as much part of our heritage as old homes.

With that in mind, I decided to try and find out the names of streams in Whonnock and Ruskin.

Rivers Day is coming up on Sept. 28 and this seems a fine time to share my findings to date.

I started with a search of the federal and provincial geographical records, but they only show the names of Kanaka Creek, Whonnock Creek, and York Creek, which are all flowing directly into the Fraser River.

The planning department for the City of Maple Ridge kindly helped me with a map of the municipality, showing streams and their registered names.

In the area south of Dewdney Trunk Road, between 256th Street and the Stave River, I found the following named and unnamed streams.

From the west, three short streams feed into Whonnock Creek around 104th Avenue: The Henery (Hendry? Henry?) Brook, Norris Creek and Courtney Creek.

Ritche (Ritchie?) Brook and Chuck Creek join Norris Creek on its short way to Whonnock Creek.

Vincent Creek joins Whonnock Creek from the east.

Old-timers knew Vincent Creek as Ruskin Creek, and perhaps the record should again show the name Ruskin Creek because the watershed of Vincent Creek covers most of Ruskin and the origin of the name “Vincent” is obscure.

Around Bell Road, close to the Mission border, the streams are part of the McCormack Creek flowing into Stave River.

Further north, two short streams, Hannah Brook and Painters Brook, cross the eastern border of Maple Ridge, going into the Stave.

On the west side of Whonnock, Sprott Creek, named after a respected English family that lived in the area, reaches the Fraser west of Spilsbury Street.

The western tributary of Sprott Creek starts just south of 102nd Avenue and crosses 256th Street at 100th and again at 98th Avenue.

A small, unnamed creek joins it at 96th Avenue.

The eastern tributary starts south of 98th Avenue and crosses Rolley Road and Spilsbury Street.

The two tributaries of Sprott Creek meet just before the Fraser.

West of 263rd Street is Hackney Creek, named after Arthur Hackney, who died in the First World War.

Along 263rd Street itself runs a creek named Bellamy. Both creeks have their main catchment area between 98th and 96th Avenue.

In the heart of Whonnock we find Cook Creek, which commences at 96th Avenue, crosses Byrnes Road and passes River Road just east of Sue’s feed store, where it is hidden by the hay shed that bridges it.

Cook Creek was named after Charles Cook, who owned a substantial portion of land in that area in the 1890s. The name Cook Creek does not appear in the municipal records.

A short distance further up River Road is an unnamed stream that starts just south of 100th Avenue and crosses Kearns Avenue and River Road.

York Creek, sometimes mistakenly called Rolley Creek, has two tributaries, one west and the other east of 272nd Street. Both start north of 112th Avenue.

Zz Brook (who invented that name?) joins the western tributary at 108th Avenue. The eastern stream tributary is called Brynes (Byrnes?) Brook at its start.

The two streams tributaries come together just before Bell Avenue. York Creek is then met from the west by Davies Brook coming from the 100th Avenue area before continuing its way across 96th Avenue and around the cemetery to the Fraser. York Creek was named after a former Whonnock postmaster and shopkeeper.

Kanaka Creek only touches Whonnock's northwest corner. Chadsey Creek starts west of 272nd Street between 108th and 112th Streets and ends at Kanaka Creek. The water of all streams near Kanaka Creek at 112th Avenue, at Cunningham Avenue, and at the western end of 108th Street flows into Chadsey Creek. Only one of the tributaries of Chadsey Creek has a name: Hall Creek crosses 112th Avenue halfway between 272nd Street and Ferguson Street.

It appears that the early settlers and later residents gave private names to minor creeks. Those names were easily changed or forgotten but some made it into the official records. Who were these people and why was a stream named after them?

The quest for answers to those questions has just started.

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