

THE EDSON-GRANDE PRAIRIE TRAIL



Mail sled on Edson-Grande Prairie Trail (ca. 1914) by Byron-May Company Limited.



Honeymoon couple under canvas shelter on sled on Edson-Grande Prairie Trail, Alberta (1914) by Byron-May Company Limited.



Ferry on the Edson-Grande Prairie Trail (1914).

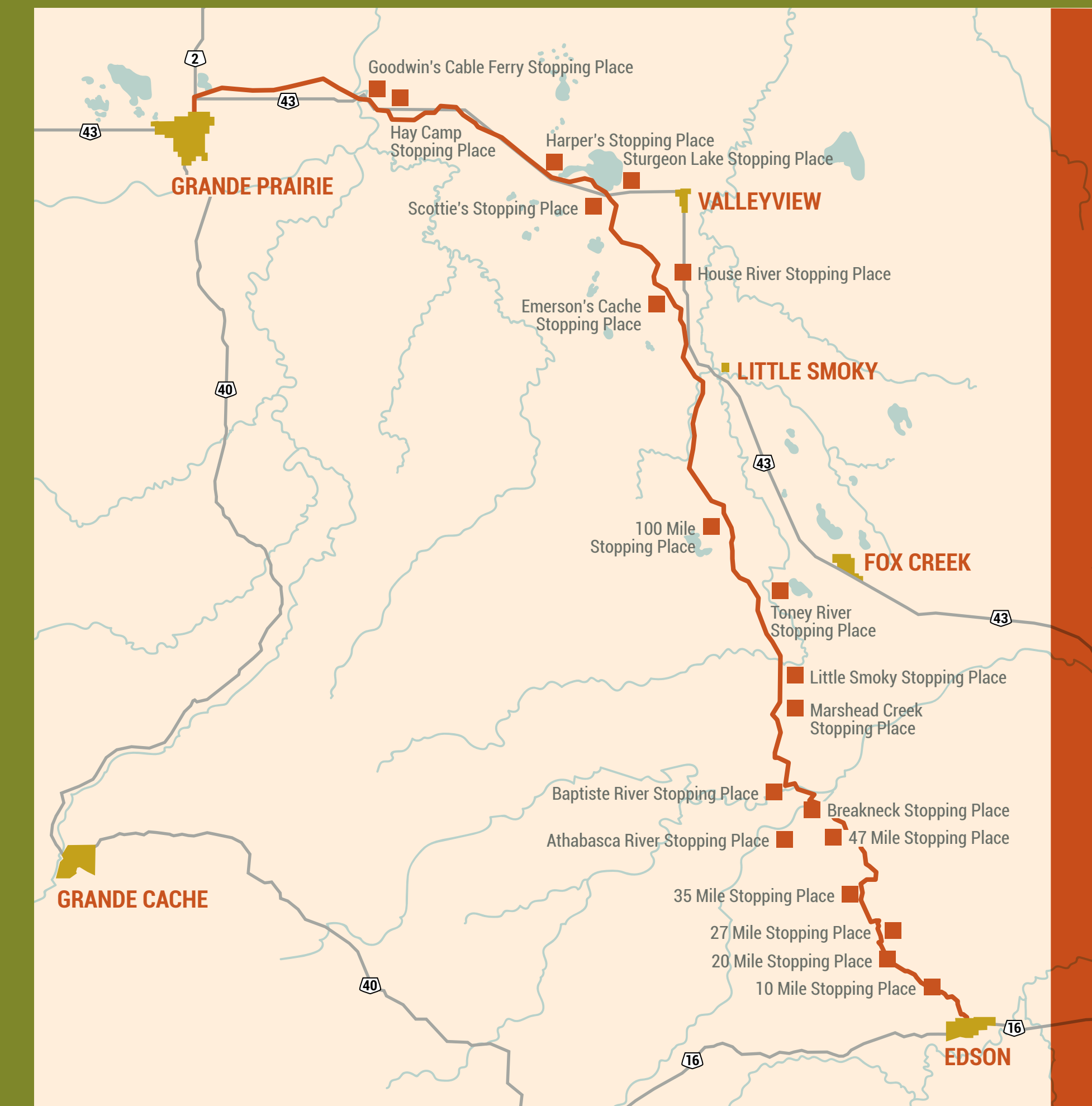
The Edson-Grande Prairie Trail played a crucial role in the agricultural settlement of Northwestern Alberta. It was built in 1911 to establish a direct route into the Peace Country and the Grande Prairie.

The rich agricultural potential of the region was well known by the early 1900s but the prospect of large-scale settlement was threatened by the region's isolation and poor transportation. The existing overland route from Edmonton to Peace River Crossing was roughly 560 kilometres long, with an additional 200 kilometres for those continuing to Grande Prairie. Pressure mounted on the Government of Alberta to construct a better transportation route into the region. The result was the Edson-Grande Prairie Trail.

The Edson-Grande Prairie Trail connected the Grand Trunk Pacific Railway line at Edson to the Peace River District via Sturgeon Lake and then through to the newly established community of Grande Prairie. The roughly 400-kilometre trail consisted of a cleared path cut through boreal forest, wetlands and open prairie, with sections of corduroy road (made by laying courses of logs across the width of the trail) over low-lying and swampier sections. Ferries were built to cross the Athabasca, Baptiste, Smoky and Little Smoky Rivers, while entrepreneurs opened over twenty stopping houses along the trail that offered accommodation and food. Most of the travellers over the trail were destined for the Grande Prairie and Saskatoon Lake area, or onto connecting trails northward to Spirit River and Dunvegan, or westward to Beaverlodge and the Pouce Coupe Prairie of British Columbia.

The trail was heavily used from 1911 until 1916, when the newly constructed Edmonton, Dunvegan & British Columbia Railway became the primary transportation option and the trail fell into disuse.

Severson's Stopping Place, Edson-Grande Prairie Trail, Alberta (ca. 1912) by Byron-May Company Limited.



Edson-Grande Prairie Trail, with major stopping houses.



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