

Deas Island Regional Park Green Space Tour Brochure

General

Deas Island is a small island (technically a peninsula) at the lower reaches of Fraser River between Richmond and Delta, formed by sediments carried by the river. Deas Island offers several miles of delightful easy hiking trails, good river views, excellent birdwatching, and some fascinating history and historical structures. The island is a patchwork of different habitats, from marshes to meadows to sand dunes, and it is for this reason that a variety of animals call it home. While the island receives a modest share of visitors, millions of folks have driven right past (rather right under) the island over the years. The George Massey Tunnel on BC 99 connecting Delta to Richmond begins its descent under the South Arm of the Fraser River at Deas Island. There is ample parking and excellent signage about the site and the trails. There are public washrooms at the **Riverside Picnic Area** on the west side of the park and at the **Fisher's Field** Picnic Area in the centre of the park.



Early History

For thousands of years, First Nations people fished the salmon-rich Fraser delta and showed settlers how to catch and utilize the fish. Although there are no middens, First Nations people probably erected weirs, preserved fish for winter consumption, and traded with other river and coastal communities. Geologically, Deas Island has evolved from the Fraser River's dynamic natural forces. Originating as a mid-channel sand bar, over many centuries it has experienced flooding, channelization, and sedimentation, changing shape several times. Eventually natural vegetation together with man's intervention in the form of dyke building and armoring has made the Island relatively stable. A narrow causeway constructed in the 1940s links it to the mainland.

John Sullivan Deas

Deas Island is named for its first settler, **John Sullivan Deas** born in 1838, a freed slave from Charleston, South Carolina who built a cannery on the island. In the 1870s it was home to the largest salmon cannery on the Fraser River, owned by John Deas. As a teenager John Deas was advertising himself as a tinsmith. John Deas, and his brother Zephaniah, joined the migration to California on the gold rush trail. Arriving in San Francisco in 1860, John Deas plied his trade as a



tinsmith. During this period in California the Black community in pre-Civil War times was troubled with legislative uncertainty. The mood was such that an exodus of the California Black community to the Fraser River gold fields occurred between 1858 and 1865. The Black community was choosing liberty under British law and was welcomed by BC Governor James Douglas. The early settlers were able to purchase land and

skilled trades were in demand. John Deas arrived in Victoria in 1862 and married Fanny Harris with whom he had eight children. John Deas spent time in the gold fields in Yale until 1868 when he and family arrived back in Victoria to operate a hardware and stove business. John Deas started a fish canning operation in 1871 on the island named after him. He proceeded to erect a cannery and assorted buildings readying for the 1873 fishing season. In 1873, through financial backers in the canning business, John Deas was able to pre-empt and purchase a large plot on the 60-acre island for \$1 per acre, where he built and ran a cannery that was located where the **Viewing Tower** stands today. The cannery processed more canned salmon than any other cannery on the Fraser River. John Deas spent approximately 15 years in BC, seven of those in Delta, marked by prosperity. He became a citizen of his adopted country and a provincial voter. John Deas sold his interests in the canning business in 1878. John Deas and his family then moved to Portland, Oregon. On July 22, 1880, John Deas passed away at age 42, leaving his wife Fanny and seven remaining children.

Inverholme Schoolhouse & Burrvilla & Delta Agricultural Hall

The park is home to three stunning historic buildings, moved to Deas Island from parts of Delta for preservation. They've been restored and painted in attractive, coordinating colours. Interpretive panels throughout the park explain local history. The three buildings aren't



the only historical landmarks around. If you take a guided canoe tour, you'll pass by the sunken hull of the *Audrey B*, a rumrunner from the prohibition days. One of the last one-room schoolhouses in Delta, **Inverholme Schoolhouse** (1909) was moved from East Ladner to the park in 1981 and was restored in 1982. The **Delta Agricultural Hall** (1899), a grange-like building, was moved from Ladner to Deas Island in 1989

and is now the Park Operation Centre. If you're a fan of Raymond Burr, Canadian-American actor primarily known for his title roles in the television dramas *Perry Mason* and *Ironside*, you'll be interested to know that the **Burrvilla** (Victorian Style House, 1905-06), a beautiful two-story Queen Anne Revival home on the site, was home to three generations of the Burr family until the early 1970s. It was moved to Deas Island from River Road in December 1981. The attic is a summer nursery for hundreds of bats.



Fisher's Field Picnic Area

With a beautiful setting next to the Fraser River, Deas Island Regional Park is a great place for a picnic. There are picnic tables throughout the park and lots of grassy areas to spread out blankets. There is also a covered picnic area at **Fisher's Field** in the centre of the island that is available by reservation. **Fisher's Field** includes a day use picnic area with



a picnic shelter, information signs, washrooms and a parking lot. Most hiking trails are accessed from here.

Viewing Tower

While Deas Island is located next to a busy highway, it is a haven for wildlife. A wooden walkway leads to a **Viewing Tower** that offers opportunities to spot birds and take in the park from a higher vantage. The **Viewing Tower** offers a scenic 180-degree view overlooking the Fraser River with great views to Lulu Island, the Burnaby skyline, and Mount Seymour and its ski slopes. Clear days allow for beautiful views of **Deas Slough** and Mount Baker rising like a lonely giant above the flat farmland. Climb the steps of the **Viewing Tower** on the **Tinmaker's Walk Trail** to look down at the river and the surrounding trees where you can spot eagles, hawks, and woodpeckers. Much of the island is graced with towering cottonwoods that add nice golden touches in autumn.



Millennium Trail

Deas Island, one of Delta's biggest regional parks, provides a scenic starting point for a walking / biking adventure, and most importantly, ample free parking. Take a spot close to the park's entrance and unload. Head straight out to the **Millennium Trail** and pedal west on this horse-pedestrian-bike trail. The **Millennium Trail** connects Deas Island to Ladner, offering over 15KM of meandering, mild-to-no elevation gravel, and paved paths through farmscapes, marinas, river bends, and suburban pop-outs at Captain's Cove Marina and central Ladner.

Park Trails Loop

A grand circuit hiking of the 300-acre park encompassing the island entails heading out on the **Tinmaker's Walk Trail** to the **Riverside Walk** and then an out and back on **Island Tip Trail**. Then return to your starting point by following **the Sand Dune Trail** to the **Dyke Loop Trail** to the **Slough View Trail** and finishing up on the **Tidal Pond Trail**. This configuration has you hiking a good portion of trails in the park for a grand loop of around 2.7 miles (4.5 km).

Slough View Trail

The **Slough View Trail** includes some excellent viewing points into **Deas Slough**. During late fall and early spring this is an excellent place to observe migratory birds.

Dyke Loop Trail

Wander along the **Dyke Loop Trail** to see if you can spot rabbits and small songbirds hiding in the brambles.



