

# Welcome To The Dundas Townsite

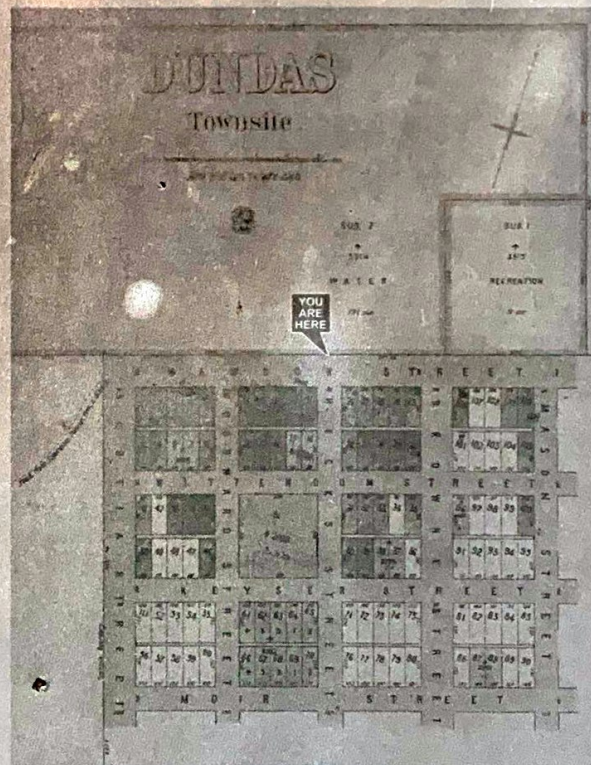
*"But if a town has no problems or obstacles to face, its progress becomes stagnated because there is no competition and there is no need to expand to overcome any obstacles. Dundas was such a town and lost the initiative to the young and virile Norseman."*

## The History of Norseman – The Early Years

If you had stood at this point sometime back in 1894 you'd have been looking down Hicks St with the Dundas Hotel almost in front of you. To the right of that building would have been the blacksmith shop and beyond it the Methodist Church (on Keyser St). To the left, along Mawson St, was the store and a number of houses. The site of the proposed school was two blocks in front of you, on Keyser St, between Browne and Hicks. The town of Dundas was just finding its feet.

Yet in a fascinating twist of history Dundas started to die almost as it came to life. In August 1894 gold was discovered 25 km north of here, near what is now Norseman, and suddenly the focus that had been on Dundas was lost. More and richer finds around the new town swung the momentum of development heavily in its favour and the settlement laid out here in such detail by Surveyor Angove began to wither and die.

Early Dundas was a ramshackle place, consisting mainly of tents and rudimentary houses built of bush timber and hessian bag walls. The only buildings of any substance were the hotel and the Warden's Court. What became of the latter is not known, but the hotel hung on in what was then a ghost town, catering for coaches and travellers on the road to or from Esperance, until the coming of the railway in 1929.

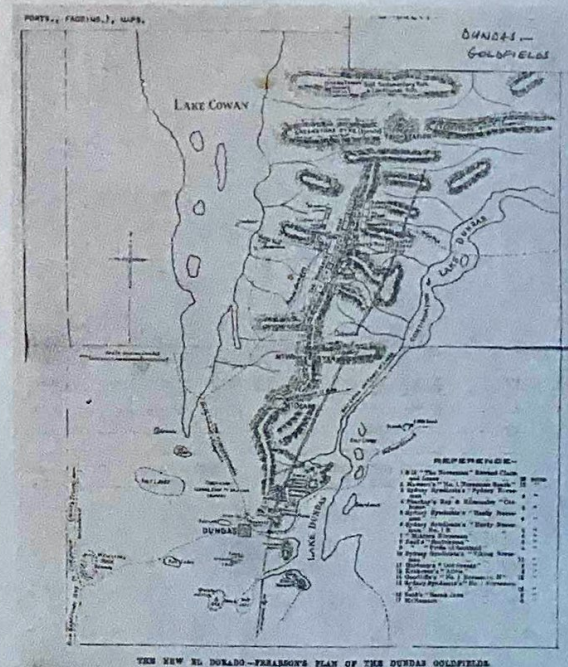


The original Dundas Townsite plan, as drawn in 1896.  
Courtesy Battye Library.



If you plan to explore any of the tracks leading towards Lake Dundas please **STAY OFF THE LAKE!** Many vehicles have become bogged on what appears to be firm ground.

Whether Dundas even had the time to become 'stagnated' is doubtful. And to suggest that it had no 'problems or obstacles to face' could be somewhat off the mark – yet die it did, and quickly too. Take a few minutes to walk around the old townsite – despite its early demise it may have a story or two to share with you...



Frearson's hand-drawn plan of the 'new eldorado' – the Dundas Goldfields – circa 1895.  
Courtesy Battye Library.



# A Hard But Happy Life

Despite its brief existence, Dundas was 'home' to a number of families during the 1890s. Most had come here the hard way, from ports on the south coast where they were unloaded into a new and apparently hostile world. Women and children walked beside carts and wagons loaded with the makings of their new lives. Along the way they camped rough for as much as a week – a fine introduction to the challenging life ahead.

As in most new goldfields towns building materials were scarce and homes were basic at best. Water, we know, was rarely plentiful, and supplies of food had to travel the same arduous route from Esperance – or come via an equally demanding journey from Coolgardie. The hotel would certainly have been the centre of much social activity, but for the residents of the Dundas fields there were other options.



It is doubtful that homes as substantial as these were built in Dundas.  
Courtesy Phototone Colonial Library.



An early picnic at nearby Three Mile Rocks.  
Courtesy Shire of Dundas.

Dundas Rocks, a few kilometres south of here, is a beautiful area with many eye-catching rock formations. It made a pleasant outing and many an enjoyable picnic would have been held there among the giant granite boulders and the profuse spring wildflowers. Indeed, the rock outcrops immediately west of the townsite would also have been a popular playground for local children and adults alike.



The Dundas Hotel, 1896.  
Courtesy Shire of Dundas.

Once Norseman developed in the latter half of the 1890s Dundas residents must have been tempted to make the long journey north for major social events such as balls, and to obtain supplies and undertake other business. They'd have travelled the same early 'road' as did the 'Cobb & Co' coaches that serviced the route to the south coast, and may indeed have utilised that service to make the journey.

Memoirs from the time suggest that while life on the Dundas fields was hard it was generally happy. In the furnace created by remoteness and hardship rich bonds of friendship were formed. Indeed, it was this richness of human interaction that was the hallmark of life for all who lived and worked along the old Coach Road. While the creaking wheels stopped turning long ago the memories – and the example - live on.



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A Hard But Happy Life





Woodward St.

← HERITAGE TRAIL →

SITE 10

← PICNIC AREA

HIGHWAY 2 →

← 25 NORSEMAN

Informational sign



Informational sign