

# CANADA'S BREADBASKET

# BUFFALO POUND

*Those who live in Southern Ontario often think of it as "Downtown Canada." It's easy to believe that the rest of the country revolves around a magic pivot located at the corner of Yonge Street and Eglinton Avenue. As campers, our mission is to get as far away from this, or whichever geographical centre causes us stress, as possible. Quite often, we choose the beautiful lands and waters of Canada's West Coast. It seems that every Ontarian knows at least one person who went on a visit to beautiful B.C. or the Alberta mountains and just didn't come back.*

Birdwatchers at Buffalo Pound Provincial Park.

**I**t is the space in between these two areas that is sometimes forgotten or even consciously avoided. Unbeknownst to many a downtown dweller like myself, Canada's Prairies are rich in history, both natural and man-made, and are far more beautiful and enthralling than their detractors would have us believe.

Driving west, there's a long, slow descent from the rocky, treed terrain of the Canadian Shield that begins around Kenora, Ontario, and comes to an abrupt end about an hour outside of Winnipeg, Manitoba, very near the longitudinal midpoint of the country. The trees, which get progressively scrubbier and shorter, suddenly give way to wide open wheat fields. You would swear you can see Calgary in the distance.

The Prairies, reputed to be as flat as pan-

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cakes, actually roll gently, giving the vista depth and colour. Between the few big cities (Winnipeg, Brandon, Regina) the Trans-Canada Highway passes by (never directly through) hundreds and hundreds of kilometres of Canada's "breadbasket," the primarily agricultural grain-producing field that has fed the country for generations.

The Trans-Canada Highway is generally flat and straight, and it's easy to make good time between urban centres. However, it's a shame to do so. The

Prairie provinces offer a great deal of beauty and a myriad of recreational opportunities to those willing to drift a short way off the beaten track to discover them. One such treasure is Saskatchewan's Buffalo Pound Provincial Park, located approximately thirty kilometres off the Trans-Canada Highway, north of Moose Jaw. It's smack in the middle of the Prairies, an ideal layover for travellers who want a full-on camping experience in the beautiful and unique land of the big sky.





by Taylor Wilson

Tourism Saskatchewan/Douglas E. Walker

Buffalo Pound takes its name from an Aboriginal bison-hunting technique by which a herd of the animals would be driven into a geographical corral or "pound," where they would be easily taken for food. The present-day provincial park is located in an area where the gently rolling grassland suddenly drops into the Qu'Appelle River valley, which once presented an ideal hunting opportunity. The prairie supported huge herds of plains bison until the influx of settlers from Europe hunted them to near extinction.

The Qu'Appelle River was dammed in 1940, causing the formation of a thirty-five-kilometre man-made lake. In 1963 the park was designated by the province, and in the early 1970s a wild herd of bison were relocated from the United States to the park, where they remain



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and can be viewed.

Because it's quite close to Moose Jaw (about half an hour) and only an hour's drive from Regina, Buffalo Pound serves a large population of Saskatchewan natives who use it for recreational camping. As a popular destination, it boasts a considerable number of amenities, including an all-summer grocery store, a fast-food outlet, a swimming pool in addition to two sand beaches, and boating and fishing opportunities in the lake, as well as a stocked trout pond, interpretive programs every Saturday, and displays at the Nicolle Homestead, buildings erected by the Nicolle family, which originally settled on this site in the early 1900s.

Buffalo Pound offers five different camping areas, with about two hundred campsites in total. Most of them are located in the valley in proximity to the lake. Sites are an average size for provincial park sites, although they can be located quite close together. Drinking water and comfort facilities are readily available, and both serviced and unserviced campsites are offered. There are also some barrier-free paved sites in the park.

Because of the relatively large population served, the park can fill up in peak season. The Hilltop campground, located above the valley and often the last campground offered, is considered less desir-

able because of its distance from the lake. To a native of the Prairies, the wheat fields surrounding this area are probably quite common and rather boring. To someone from another part of the country, camping out in the Hilltop on the open prairie can be a unique and beautiful experience. Because it is visited by fewer campers, this campground is likely to offer more opportunities to view wildlife just outside the tent or trailer door than are the other areas.

The Nicolle Flats area offers a natural viewing experience unique to its geographical location. It features several trails, including a wheelchair-accessible marsh boardwalk, and a trail that passes the bison compound, with a tower that allows better viewing of the herd. Indigenous animals include more than fifty species of birds, beaver, coyote, muskrat, and several types of deer.

There are more than thirty kilometres of mountain biking trails, many of which double as cross-country skiing paths in winter, and there's even a downhill ski opportunity (rare in the Prairies, for obvious reasons) at the White Track ski area. Close by, the city of Moose Jaw and its surrounding area offer a number of amenities and attractions. Highlights include Casino Moose Jaw, the Burrowing Owl Interpretive Centre, inter-