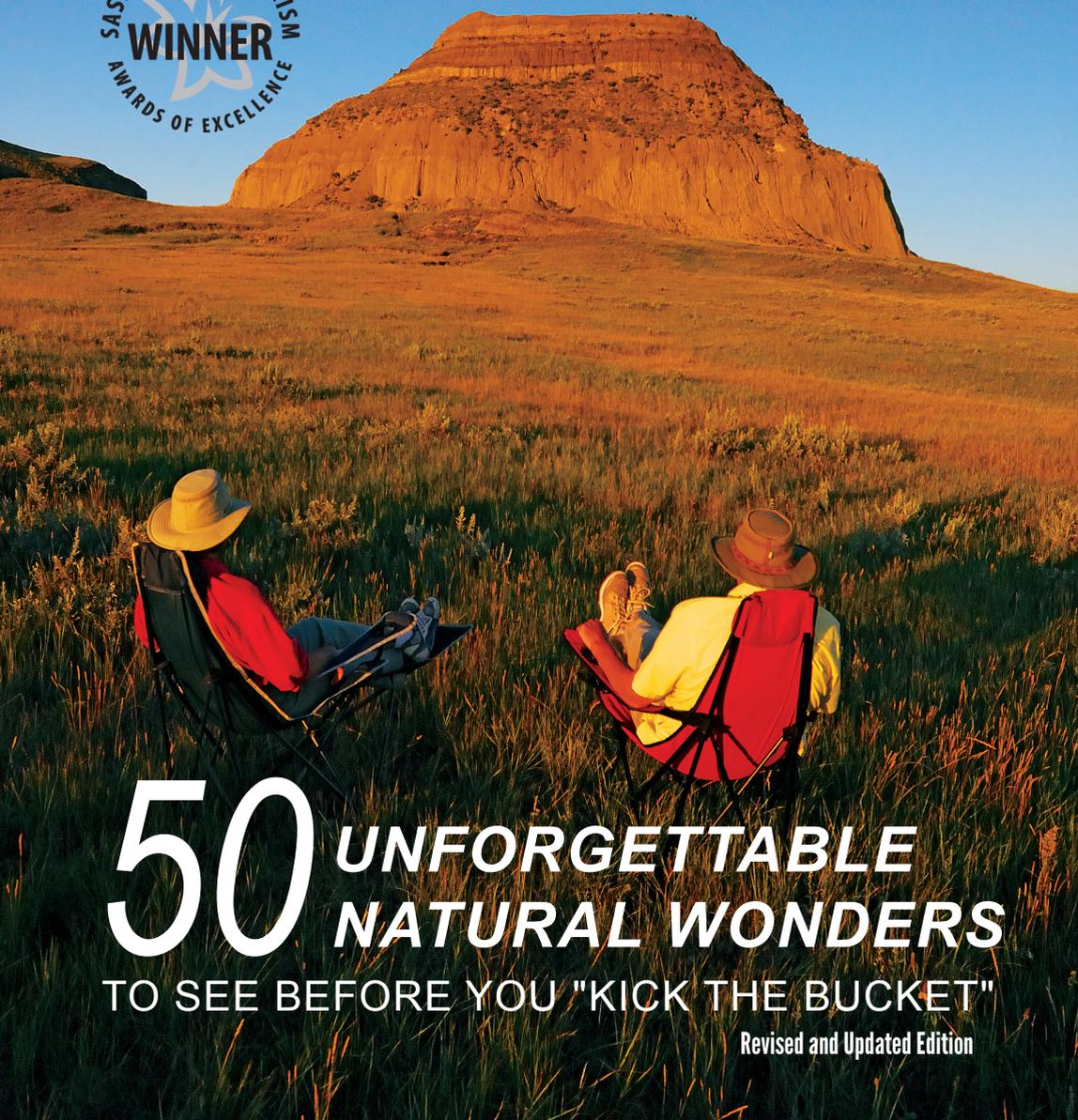


CANADIAN BESTSELLER

The Great Saskatchewan BUCKET LIST

Robin and Arlene Karpan



**50 UNFORGETTABLE
NATURAL WONDERS**
TO SEE BEFORE YOU "KICK THE BUCKET"

Revised and Updated Edition

Book Synopsis

The Great Saskatchewan Bucket List – 50 Unforgettable Natural Wonders to See Before You Kick the Bucket ISBN 978-099508752-1 The authors, as well as photographers of all images in the book are Robin Karpan and Arlene Karpan, both TMAC members.

Hear the roar and feel the power of Saskatchewan's highest waterfall. Marvel at the mysterious Eye Cave on "Dead Man's River". Watch the rising sun magically transform Castle Butte into a brilliant red monolith. Get up close and personal with wildlife found nowhere else in Canada. These are a few of the top 50 natural wonders that await.

The book is both a practical guidebook and a showcase of the surprising array of natural wonders in Saskatchewan. It appeals both to those who aspire to visit as many of the 50 as they can, as well as to armchair travellers who buy the book mainly to appreciate our amazing natural heritage.

We chose the 50 natural wonders to be the best of the best that Saskatchewan has to offer, but also to be representative of the entire province, with coverage from north, south, east, and west. Each entry has a description of what makes it special, how to get there, resources for more information, and photos.

Each of the 50 places is rated as to how difficult it is to visit, from 1 (easy) to 5 (difficult). The vast majority are accessible to anyone with average abilities, though a few take more effort and a couple are just plain difficult. Any quest worth its salt needs a few challenges. The sections included here show samples of both easy and more difficult natural wonders.

This revised and completely updated edition of the book, published in 2021, builds on the first edition which went through five printings, became a Canadian Bestseller, and won the Travel Media Award in the Saskatchewan Tourism Awards of Excellence. For six consecutive years, it was the number one bestselling Saskatchewan-published book of any genre, according to SaskBooks (Saskatchewan Publishers Group).

Contents

Introduction	8	Steep, Stunning, and Secluded – Rice River Canyon	96
Starting at the Top – Cypress Hills Lookouts	11	Cut Stones from an Ancient Sea – Limestone Crevices of Amisk Lake	100
Morning Magic – Sunrise over the Conglomerate Cliffs	13	Sculptures in White – Nipekamew Sand Cliffs	104
Bountiful Blooms and Blossoms – Wildflowers of Cypress Hills	18	Twisted Logic – Legends of the Crooked Bush	106
Guardian of the Whitemud – Jones Peak	23	The Road to Love – Narrow Hills Scenic Drive	109
Babbling Brooks and Vibrant Vistas – Pine Cree Regional Park	26	Jewels of the Forest – Gem Lakes	112
Prairie Panorama – Sunset Over 70 Mile Butte	28	Art, Beauty, and Fabulous Fishing – High Rock Narrows	115
Grassland Chatterboxes – Yips and Yelps in Prairie Dog Town	31	Whitewater Playground – Otter Rapids Area	118
The Baddest of Them All – Rock Creek Badlands	34	Icon of the North – Nistowiak Falls	121
Seeing Red – Castle Butte Sunrise	38	Tea Time, Big Time – Kettle Falls	124
Twice Round the Bend – South Saskatchewan / Red Deer Forks	42	The Thunder and the Roar – Wapumon Gorge	128
Windswept Wonderland – Great Sand Hills	46	Written in Stone – Painted Cliffs of Smith Narrows	130
The Accessible Wild Prairie – Brunyee Ridge & Prairie Vista Trail	51	In the Footsteps of Franklin and Mackenzie on the Methye Portage	132
Doin’ the Dunes – Sand Dunes of Douglas Provincial Park	54	Big and Bold with Hidden Delights – Smoothrock Falls	135
Sculpted in Stone – Fanciful Formations of Roche Percee	58	Haunting Beauty – Skull Canyon	138
Winged Odyssey – Fall Migration	60	Mother Nature’s Whimsy – Manitou Falls	141
Keepers of the Shore – Shorebirds of the Chaplin Lake Area	64	Tyrrell’s Treasure – Burr Falls	144
North America’s First Bird Sanctuary – Last Mountain Lake	68	Mysterious Eye Cave of “Dead Man’s River”	147
Experience Near Weightlessness – Little Manitou Lake	71	Realm of the Giant – Lodge Bay	150
Springtime Orgy – Snakes of Fort Livingstone	73	Kaleidoscopic Cliffs – Reed Bay	154
Letting Loose on the Lek – Dance of the Sharp-tails	76	Like Nowhere Else on Earth – Giant Dunes of Athabasca	157
Drive-thru Delight – Qu’Appelle Valley	78	Sentinels of the Sand – Thomson Bay’s Exhumed Forest	162
Oasis in the Hills – Duck Mountain Highlands	82	Butterscotch Pudding and Whipped Cream – William River and Delta from the Air	164
Saskatchewan’s Longest Hike – The Boreal Trail	86	The Peace and the Power – Hunt Falls	168
River Rendezvous – Saskatchewan River Forks	90	The Saskatchewan Sky	171
Leafy Lustre – Fall in Prince Albert National Park	92		

Twisted Logic Legends of the Crooked Bush



The name says it all—every trunk, every branch, of every tree is twisted and contorted.

Trembling aspens are “the” trees of Saskatchewan’s parklands, and for the most part, they all look much the same. Except these. This small bush, where trees can’t seem to decide if they should grow up, down, sideways, or in spirals, is just plain weird. Since aspens reproduce by sending up underground shoots from a parent tree, even small trees in this grove are distorted. More intriguing yet is that nearby bushes are all perfectly normal. The story goes that when cattle used to graze in the adjoining field, they would never wander into this bush, even though it wasn’t fenced. And some folks insist that dogs aren’t too keen on heading into this bush. So what’s going on?

Not surprising, the mysterious bush has been the subject of much colourful folklore and speculation. One local resident suggested that all the trees are crooked because

they buried a lawyer here. Years ago, another fellow swore that he saw a flying saucer land at this spot. All the passengers got out, peed on the ground, climbed back aboard, then flew off. The trees were never the same after that! Mind you, this was in the days before spaceships were restroom equipped for your travelling comfort. The fact that this neck of the woods was famous for its homebrew is probably just a coincidence. Scientists, spoilsports that they are, have more mundane explanations involving genetic mutations and such. But what caused the mutation in the first place? We like to think that it was spaceman pee.

This is the perfect place to come to marvel at the strange phenomenon, let your imagination run wild, and arrive at your own conclusions. Anytime during spring, summer, or fall is a good time to visit. Winter access depends on snow cover. Come either early or late in the season when the trees have no leaves, and the bare twisted branches make the place feel even more spooky.

Location: About 65 km northeast of the Battlefords in the Thickwood Hills, north of Speers and south of Alticane.

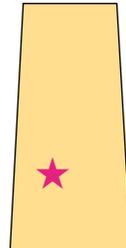
N 52.87102, W 107.53751





Difficulty Rating: ① Easy

Getting There: Directions to the Crooked Bush are signposted from Hwy #40 between Hafford and Speers. Heading east of Speers on Hwy #40, take the first road to the north and go 16 km, then west for 0.6 km. The entire distance from Hwy #40 is along a good gravel road. You'll find a parking area next to the trees. It's important to stay on the boardwalk to avoid compacting the soil around the trees so they can continue sending up their crooked offspring.



Springtime Orgy Snakes of Fort Livingstone



Red-sided garter snakes in a mating ball.

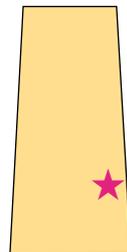
Who doesn't like snakes? Here you don't merely see a few slithering around, but literally piles of writhing reptiles in the thousands. The garter snakes have been here for a long time, likely hundreds of years. Then things got a bit complicated almost a century and a half ago when the Canadian government built the most important institution in western and northern Canada right on top of them. The problem was that the fort-builders didn't know it at the time.

The newly-formed North West Mounted Police completed their historic March West in 1874. They established their first post at Fort Livingstone, which served as Mountie headquarters. This was also the first capital of the North-West Territories prior to moving the capital to Battleford in 1878. The recruits soon discovered that Fort



Livingstone's pleasant site on the banks of the Swan River was already occupied—by wriggling red-sided garter snakes. Lots of them. The snakes spend the winter in an underground hibernaculum in the riverbank, then stream out en masse during warm spring days. Journals written at the fort make many references to snakes getting into everything and causing quite a fuss. Mounties often passed the time by having snake-catching contests.

Fort Livingstone is long gone; all that remains is an historic monument and plaques documenting its former glory. The snakes, however, are still there and continue their age-old rituals. As they emerge from their hibernaculum and the weather warms, the red-sided reptiles are immediately ready to mate, and they're not shy about it. More than a hundred males could descend on a female, and as more join in the bedlam, they form mating balls of snakes, sometimes slowly rolling down the slopes in a knotted coiled mass. Looking at the thick undulating heaps of snakes, it's hard to imagine how they become untangled. The orgy continues on and on, with several different concentrations, sometimes growing in size and sometimes breaking into smaller units. Eventually they all disperse to feed on insects, frogs, worms, and other tasty morsels, with females giving birth to live babies later in the summer.



Location: North of Pelly on the banks of the Swan River.
N 51.90588, W 101.95939

Difficulty Rating: ① Easy. The road could be a problem in very wet conditions.

Getting There: Take the grid road directly north of Pelly for 5 km, then turn west at the sign for Fort Livingstone. Follow this road for 2.7 km to the historic marker. Keep going west on the same road past the historic marker for another 0.2 km to a clearing between two bushes. In spring there will likely be packed grass where other cars have parked. Walk north (look for a worn path) only a few metres to the rim of the riverbank. You'll probably see some snakes on the rim, but the biggest concentrations are generally just over the rim on the slope of the banks. You may hear the snakes before you see them, a slight swooshing sound through the low shrubs as they react to your footsteps. There are so many that you have to be careful where you step. If you stand still, some might even slither over your shoes.

When to Go: The window of opportunity to see this phenomenon is quite short, usually a span of a couple of weeks or so in early May—around Mother's Day is generally considered optimal. Peak times could vary according to the weather. If it has been a colder than normal spring, the snakes may decide to stay snuggled in their burrows for another week or so. Sunny warm days could bring them out sooner. It may be worthwhile calling the village office in Pelly to see what the action is like.

Resources: Pelly village office: www.pelly.ca 306-595-2124



Like Nowhere Else on Earth Giant Dunes of Athabasca



Sand blows off the crest of a giant dune.

The Athabasca Sand Dunes are quite simply the top natural wonder of Saskatchewan, if not all of Canada. Awesome features abound, with the giant dunes the most impressive of all.

The Athabasca Sand Dunes stretch for about 100 kilometres along the south shore of Lake Athabasca—the largest active dunes in Canada and the most northerly major dunes in the world. It’s as if a desert-like environment were somehow misplaced in the northern forest, bordered by lakes and sliced by rivers. It’s not only the stunning scenery around every corner that’s special. Botanists consider this among the most important places in Canada, with over 50 rare plants, some of which grow nowhere else on Earth.

The highlight is the expansive William River Dune Field west of the William River, a bit south of the lake’s shore. Sprawling across the middle of this dune field lie 40 or



Above: Only sparse grasses grow far into the dune field.

Opposite: The knife-edge crest of a giant dune at sunset.

so giant dunes, some over a kilometre long and as high as 35 metres, or over 100 feet. Many have knife-edge crests running in sinuous curves, where powdery grains of sand are whipped by the wind. As you struggle up an imposing monster, your feet sink with every step, but once on top, the view is unbelievable. Sunset is pure magic, as one side of the dune falls into shadow while the other is saturated with rich shades of gold.

Location: Centre of the William River Dune Field in the Athabasca Sand Dunes, west of the William River, and slightly south of Lake Athabasca.
N 59.02, W 109.30 (approximate centre of William River Dune Field).

Difficulty Rating: 4 Considerable effort required.

Getting There: Just arranging to visit the Athabasca Sand Dunes requires a good deal of effort in planning, let alone making your way to the giant dunes and back.

Part of Athabasca Sand Dunes Provincial Park, this is a wilderness area with no road access, no communities, and no services of any kind. To get there you have to either fly or take a boat, and be fully equipped for wilderness camping. Occasionally, tour operators offer guided excursions (check with Tourism Saskatchewan for a current list of operators providing transportation services or guided trips). Stony Rapids is the main service centre on Lake Athabasca, where you can charter float planes. You



may also be able to arrange boat transport from Lake Athabasca communities such as Fond du Lac or Uranium City. However, travelling on this wide open part of the huge lake is seldom easy as rough conditions are often the rule.

If the lake is calm (and that's a big "if"), float planes may be able to land near the mostly beach-lined shallow shore of Thomson Bay, which curves in a wide 25-km arc east of the mouth of the William River. Cantara Lake, just south of Beaver Point at the east end of Thomson Bay, is an alternate landing spot in rough conditions. From this small protected lake, a portage trail of about 0.5 km leads to the shore of Lake Athabasca.

Our preferred way of getting to the giant dunes is to canoe along the William River. We have canoed down the river (a fairly challenging paddle), but on other trips, also headed upstream from Lake Athabasca. Even though there are no rapids to contend with in the last 18 km, it's still a tough upstream paddle against the often strong current and extremely shallow water in a sand-choked, wide braided stream. Sometimes the river is too shallow for travel if water levels are low. Once you arrive at the point where the rapids end and the braided section begins, you've found the perfect jumping-off point to hike to the giant dunes.

Hiking to the river from Thomson Bay is another option. You can start at the western end of the Thomson Bay Dune Field that borders the lake, then walk southwest along the edge of the dune field for about 5 km to the William River, close to the end of the rapids. As a general rule, it is possible to wade across the wide and shallow river. However, do not simply assume that you can cross without carefully assessing conditions. Varying water levels and shifting sandbars can make the river bottom unstable. Occasionally, the channels may be too deep to cross safely, and you may have trouble finding firm footing in the constantly moving sand.

On the west side of the river, it's a walk of about two hours to the giant dunes. We usually start by walking almost perfectly perpendicular to the river. The big dunes aren't visible from the river, but as you walk further into the endless sea of sand and gradually gain altitude, they soon become visible and you can choose the dunes

you want to visit. It is extremely important to avoid walking across the fragile desert pavement, formed when wind blows away fine sand particles, leaving a layer of tiny pebbles on the surface. You can skirt these extensive patches of desert pavement by taking a circuitous route.

In short—it ain't easy. But when you sit atop a giant dune at sunset, surrounded by sand as far as you can see, the lake in the distance, and absolutely no trappings of "civilization," it is among the most extraordinary experiences, not only in Saskatchewan, but anywhere in the world.

Resources: Contact Athabasca Sand Dunes Provincial Park for more information, as well as regulations on visiting the park: www.saskparks.com 306-425-4245



Keep walking, you'll get there eventually! It can be disconcerting walking west from the William River. To begin with, you wander into a seemingly endless sea of sand. You can't see the giant dunes until you gain some altitude.

