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Jolanda works behind the scenes. "She's the handler," says Hans. "It's a big job. She does all the care for the dogs."

The Appelmans have hosted many races but have stepped back from that, although they still attend events. The dogs still need regular exercise and lots of attention.

"They're like family," says Hans. "They'll be here till their time comes."

In 2000, the Appelmans started to look around for new places to live. It resulted in the purchase of this 480 acre farm two years later.

A herd of 23 bred cows was added in April 2003. Canada's BSE crisis hit that same year. Combined with the drought in central Alberta, it was a harsh initiation into the cattle industry.

"I had my carpentry, but it took a while to build up my clientele."

His workshop is a few hundred metres from the house down through a group of trees.

"We knew things would be better," says Jolanda, who worked in the nursing field during her first few years in Canada.

Eventually, the farm, the dogs, and Hans' carpentry kept her home.

"She does the administration and the bookkeeping," he says. "I always need something for the company and it's all long distance here, so she's driving a lot."

Hans' woodworking shop is just steps from the corrals.

"In winter I feed my cows in the morning and the rest of the day I build cupboards."

It's convenient, particularly through calving season when he breaks to monitor the cows.

Hans primarily orders kiln-dried hardwoods for his kitchen cupboard orders but there's no shortage of local raw material for personal building projects. Along the trail near the farm's perimeter is a rustic 12 x 18 foot cabin the family built from their own felled and rough-cut lumber.

The A Farm's ranch-style log-house and numerous outbuildings are set into a forest backdrop of towering spruce, fir, pine and poplars that border the scenic Battle River valley recreation area.

Two quarters are deeded with about 240 cultivated acres and the third is government lease "with lots of bush," says Hans.

The Appelmans generally put up hay and green feed but are starting to experiment with organic grains.

"So far it's peas and wheat. This year we're thinking about oats as well."

The Appelmans plan to gradually decrease the number of cattle and focus more on grains. They've been certified organic.

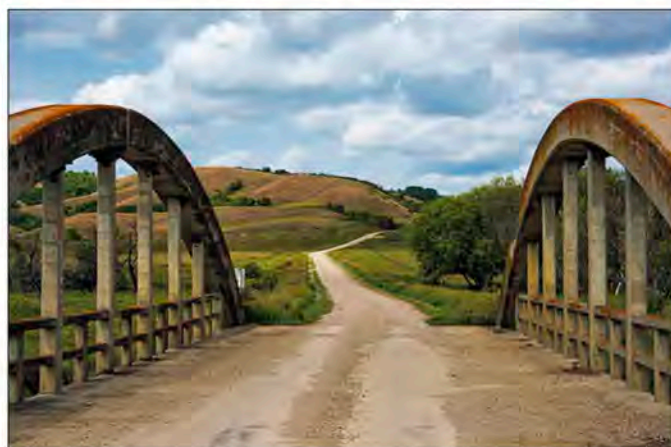
"We have lots to learn," he says. "It's interesting. I like it."

It's part of their plan to rebalance and minimize the workload but they're not sure it's working.

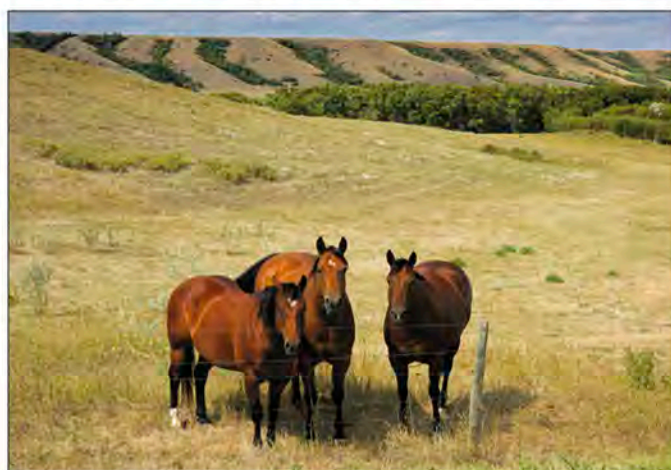
"Sometimes the big jobs coincide," says Hans.

Currently, he's got a huge kitchen cupboard project on the go and the cows are about to start calving.

"I'm trying to slow down but it doesn't seem to happen."



Bridges are to be expected when travelling in a river valley.



You never know who you'll meet while on your travels.



Pasqua Lake is one of a series of lakes in the Qu'Appelle Valley.

Sask.'s Qu'Appelle for a road trip that

TALES FROM THE ROAD



ARLENE & ROBIN KARPAN

Did you know that you can travel a third of the way across Saskatchewan while staying in the scenic Qu'Appelle Valley?

Despite this being one of the Prairie's most stunning landscapes, travellers tend to see only bits and pieces, since most highways simply cross the valley, such as Highway 11 between Regina and Saskatoon, which crosses at Lumsden.

Fortunately, it's possible to travel in the valley from here to just short of the Manitoba border. It's the ultimate road trip, taking you past his-

toric sites, provincial parks, beaches, nature reserves, and long sections of lonely back roads with little traffic.

The roads are a mixed bag, with a few paved sections, some gravel, and stretches that are fine in dry weather but best avoided when wet.

From Lumsden, head northeast along the valley to Craven, then turn east, staying on the south side of the river. Two highlights are along this short stretch — Hidden Valley, a nature preserve ideal for hiking in the hills, and beautifully situated St. Nicholas Anglican Church, among the most photographed country churches in Saskatchewan.

From the church, cross to the north side of the river and follow the gravel road northeast to Highway 6. Here we find Fairy Hill, where a hiking trail runs along slopes on preserved land owned by the Nature Conservancy of Canada.

A short stretch of the Qu'Appelle River just east of Highway 6 is the only section where we can't follow roads in the valley. The most direct detour is along grid roads just north of the river, which soon drop back into the valley between Echo and Pasqua lakes.

The chain of the four Fishing Lakes — Echo, Pasqua, Mission, and Katepwa — is the busiest part of the Qu'Appelle Valley. It's home to historic Fort Qu'Appelle (the largest community in the valley), cottage developments galore, and provincial parks such as Echo Valley with its large campground and splendid views, and the popular beach at Katepwa Point.

History abounds. Fort Qu'Appelle was an early Hudson's Bay Company post and site of the signing of Treaty 4 with the Cree and Saulteau. Nearby Lebrét, dominated by an impressive stone church, was founded in 1865. A must-do here is

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LEFT: Long sections of lonely back roads with little traffic make the Qu'Appelle Valley the ultimate road trip.

ABOVE; When visiting Lebret, walk up to the hilltop chapel for commanding views. | ROBIN AND ARLENE KARPAN PHOTOS



There are lot of old churches to see in the valley, including the Kennel Church.

Valley makes keeps surprising

to walk up to the hilltop chapel for commanding views.

At the eastern end of Katepwa Lake, the drive changes dramatically as we leave the pavement, traffic, and cottage developments to meander along the Fort Ellis Trail. While this is among the prettiest sections, parts of the road could be iffy in wet weather. A highlight is the tiny, picture-perfect community of Ellisboro, with two churches dating to the 1890s.

After crossing Highway 47, our route runs along paved Highway 247 as the Qu'Appelle River expands into Crooked and Round lakes. Here we find lakeside Crooked Lake Provincial Park, as well as a string of other recreation areas, resorts, and scenic lookouts over the lakes.

The route turns back to a gravel road shortly after Round Lake, and the valley becomes more heavily forested. A special feature is stands of Burr oak, the only oak tree indigenous to the Canadian Prairies and near the western extent of its natural range here.

After the small community of Tantallon, we pass a historic marker for Hamona, founded in 1895, and site of the first co-operative established in Saskatchewan. The site also commemorates the first harvesting of grain in Saskatchewan using a combine, which took place near here in 1910.

The route ends at Road 600, just short of the Manitoba border. Fort Esperance National Historic Site is a short drive west of 600 on the south side of the valley. Built in 1787, it was the North West Company's chief pemmican provisioning post during the fur trade. While the site is fairly low-key, it really brings home the Qu'Appelle River's long history.

For detailed directions to this and many other awesome road trips, see the guidebook *Saskatchewan's Best Scenic Drives* by Robin and Arlene Karpan.

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Burr oak is the only oak tree indigenous to the Canadian Prairies.



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