

CASTLE QUEST

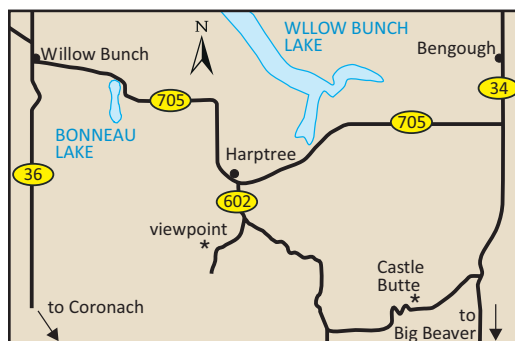
Willow Bunch to the Big Muddy Badlands

The Big Muddy Valley in south-central Saskatchewan was formed by glacial meltwater during the last Ice Age. Torrents of moving water eroded the landscape, leaving formations such as Castle Butte, and cutting deeply into the fragile valley walls.

*Just as colourful as the scenery is the human history of the Big Muddy. Once the domain of sprawling ranches, the wild terrain and hidden coulees attracted horse thieves and other outlaws. The Big Muddy was Station No. 1 on the famous Outlaw Trail running all the way to Mexico, masterminded by Butch Cassidy and the Wild Bunch. Castle Butte, just off Hwy #34 about halfway between Bengough and Big Beaver, is the most famous and accessible part of the badlands. While it's easy to get there off Hwy #34, which is well signed, this alternate "back door" route from Willow Bunch takes you across beautiful countryside and on little-used backroads. **NOTE:** Castle Butte is usually closed to visitors during spring calving season. Check the Tourism Saskatchewan website for updates.*

Willow Bunch

Before heading east into the Big Muddy Valley, a few places in and around Willow Bunch are worth a visit. Willow Bunch is known as the home of the Beupré Giant. To learn more about the town's most celebrated resident, head to the Willow Bunch Museum, housed in an impressive three-storey building originally used as a convent school. In front stands a life-sized statue of Edouard Beupré, the Willow Bunch Giant.



Born here in 1881, Edouard grew to an astounding 8 feet, 3 inches, weighed close to 400 pounds, had a 24-inch neck, and wore size 22 shoes. The museum has extensive displays on the Giant's fascinating and tragic life, along with other aspects of life in this town and its strong French influence.

www.willowbunch.ca/museum

Just south of town off Hwy #36, follow the signs to Jean-Louis Légaré Regional Park, named after another well-known Willow Bunch figure. Among Légaré's many accomplishments was gaining the trust of Chief Sitting Bull's Sioux who fled to southern Saskatchewan after defeating General Custer at the Battle of the Little Big Horn in Montana in 1876. It was largely through his efforts that Sitting Bull eventually agreed to return to the United States in 1881. The park, complete with campgrounds, golf course, playground, and other amenities lies in a wooded valley.

Willow Bunch to the Big Muddy

Take 3rd Street East in Willow Bunch, which becomes road #705. Along the first section, you travel through a wide valley bordered by long and narrow Bonneau Lake. The road curves around the end of the lake, then heads up the hills out of the valley and onto relatively level farm land. While #705 continues all the way to Hwy #34 near Bengough, the more scenic option is to approach the Big Muddy Valley from Harptree.

About 14 km from Willow Bunch, #705 curves to the south. Continue south for 4 km or so, past the Harptree Community Cemetery where the road curves to the east. On the curve (N 49.304330 W 105.413694), leave #705 and turn south on #602. Roughly 3 km farther south, you come to a Y-intersection where there's a sign on the corner indicating the Rood Cattle Co (N 49.27820 W 105.40521). The road to the left (east) goes toward Castle Butte while #602 continues south.

Before continuing on to Castle Butte, we suggest a short 4-km or so detour south of the Y-intersection along road #602. As you climb to the rim of the valley, there are



Badland formations in Big Muddy Valley.