

Eastend and the East Block

An excellent base for visiting this region is the town of Eastend, so named for being at the east end of the Cypress Hills. Nestled in the Frenchman River Valley, the area became famous for nearby dinosaur finds, including that of "Scotty", one of the most complete T.rex skeletons found anywhere. Today, the T.rex Discovery Centre is one of the town's main attractions, with exhibits that take you back millions of years to the age of dinosaurs.

Some of the terrain differs from that of the Cypress Hills farther west, where the elevation is about 400 metres higher. Unlike the western area of the Cypress Hills that were not subjected to the effects of glaciers, the Frenchman River Valley was carved ages ago from glacier meltwater. The resulting erosion exposed hillsides, creating badland-like formations, and revealing ancient fossils in the layers of sediment.

RAVENSCRAG AND MIDDLE BENCH ROADS

Scenic drives abound. In fact, you could probably choose a road at random and not be disappointed. The top drive in our opinion is the 22-km route between Eastend and Ravenscrag. Head west of Eastend on Grid Road #614, then after



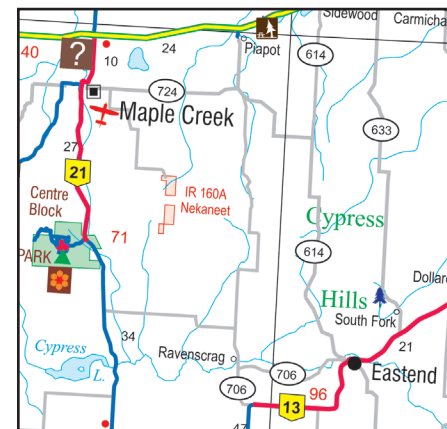
The Frenchman River next to Ravenscrag Road.

2 km, turn left onto Ravenscrag Road (N 49.51576 W 108.85546) which winds along the Frenchman River the entire way with one spectacular view after another. The north slope of the valley is heavily eroded in places, revealing several seams of bright white mud containing kaolin, which is highly prized in making ceramics because it retains its white colour after firing.

Near the start of the road is a pyramid-shaped hill known as Chocolate Peak, where kaolin mining didn't go as hoped. Many years ago, some miners had a smart idea—burn off the seam of coal in the hill to make it easy to get at the kaolin.

Not so smart after all. The coal burned slowly for years, baking the valuable clay and turning everything brown. About halfway along you can see Jones Peak, the highest point along the north rim, marked by a communications tower.

Ravenscrag Road has inviting light from early to mid-morning, then again from late afternoon to early evening. In midsummer, if you wait until too late in the evening, the sun



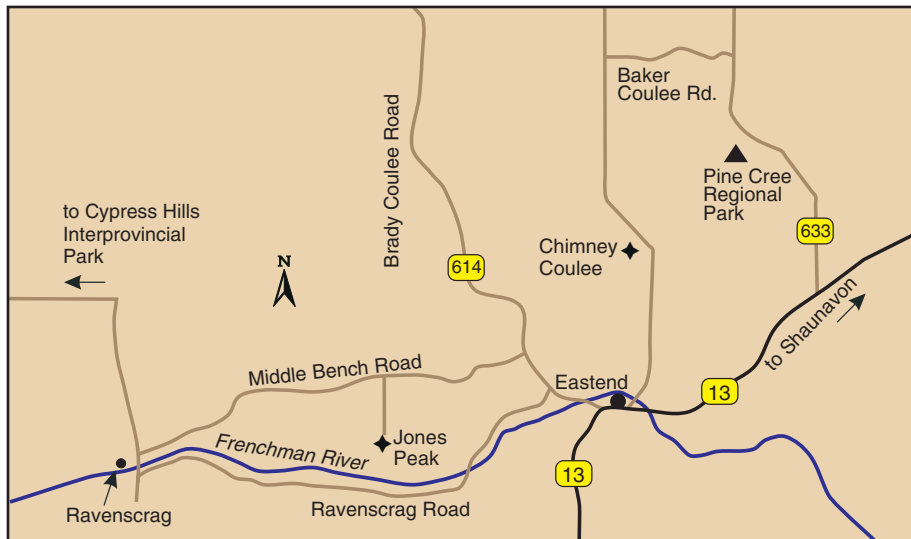
Jones Peak overlooks the Frenchman River Valley and Ravenscrag Road.



Middle Bench Road.

will be too far to the north to illuminate the north slope, which is the most impressive part of the valley. When we stay in Eastend, which has a campground near the river, we like to drive Ravenscrag Road in late afternoon, then return along Middle Bench Road in the evening, a nice loop trip that makes best use of the light.

Ravenscrag Road ends at a T-intersection with a grid road near Ravenscrag. Turn north, cross the river, then take the first road to the east, which is Middle Bench Road (N 49.49605 W 109.08746). This route takes you higher into the hills, across open rolling pastureland of native prairie. The main feature of this



Above and below: The last rays of sunlight on Jones Peak.

scenic route is Jones Peak (N 49.50193 W 108.95328). The approach road to the peak is easy to find; watch for the communications tower on the valley rim. It's named for Corky Jones, a local resident and amateur palaeontologist who unearthed many fossils, which in turn led to the area's famous dinosaur discoveries.