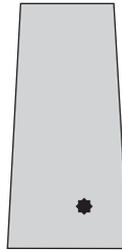


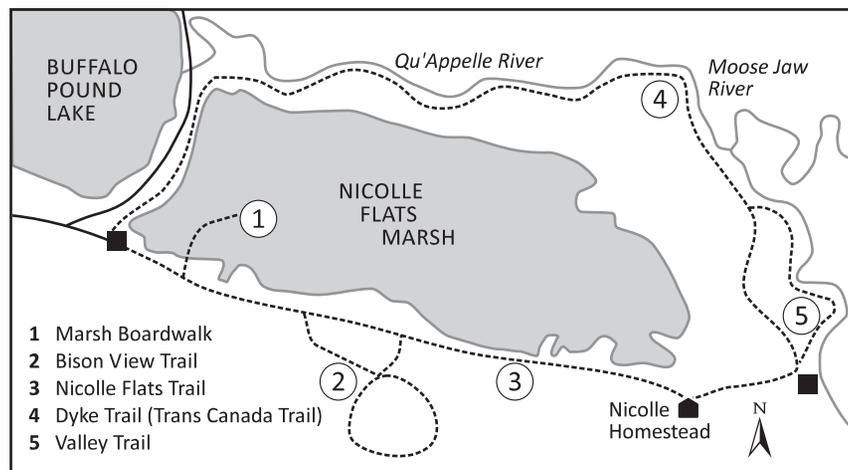
Qu'Appelle Valley



The Qu'Appelle Valley was formed some 14,000 years ago when meltwater from retreating glaciers carved a trough through the landscape. Beginning at the eastern edge of Lake Diefenbaker, the Qu'Appelle River meanders across more than half the province, twisting and turning along the broad valley floor. Typically about 3 km wide, the valley presents a dramatic change in landscape from the level plains both south and north. The south-facing hills are generally grass-covered, interspersed with shrubs and trees in coulees and sheltered spots. The north-facing side is more forest-like, dominated by trembling aspen but also including stands of chokecherry, saskatoon, Manitoba maple, dogwood, and willow.

Buffalo Pound Provincial Park

Buffalo Pound Provincial Park is on the south shore of Buffalo Pound Lake, approximately 23 km northeast of Moose Jaw. The lake is part of the



Qu'Appelle River system. Surrounded by the picturesque hills of the Qu'Appelle Valley, the lake was named for buffalo pounds in which Plains Indians used to corral wild buffalo, or bison. A captive plains bison herd roams in a range at the eastern edge of the park.

The hills provide excellent habitat for white-tailed deer, mule deer, and small animals such as rabbits, porcupines, and skunks. Gulls, pelicans, cormorants, geese, and ducks prefer lakeshore and marshy habitat.

Contact: Buffalo Pound Provincial Park
306-694-3658; 306-694-3229 (summer only)
www.saskparks.net

Nicolle Flats Nature Area

After entering the park gate, follow the signs to Nicolle Flats, which will lead you east on a road along the south shore of Buffalo Pound Lake. Nicolle Flats Marsh is at the end of the road, with a parking area, picnic sites, toilets, and maps. Hiking here offers a combination of valley scenery with excellent chances of seeing wildlife. Ducks Unlimited Canada and other conservation agencies have done extensive work to manage the marsh by building dykes that guard it from the changing water levels of the Qu'Appelle and Moose Jaw Rivers. In the fall the marsh is a major staging area for waterfowl.



Trailhead at Nicolle Flats Nature Area.

You can choose from one or more trails, or combine them in a round-the-marsh walk of about 8 km. Most trails begin from the parking area, although there is also a trailhead on the east end of the marsh, discussed under the Valley Trail. The main caution for all trails is that there will be ticks around, especially in spring and early summer.

Bison View Trail

Distance: 2.9 km loop

Time: 1 – 1.5 hr

The Bison View Trail is a short but moderately steep walk, taking you up the southern slope of the valley for spectacular views over the lake, marsh, and hills beyond. You may have a chance to watch the bison as they forage among the shrubs or wander near the fence line towards their watering area. The park has a brochure highlighting prairie plantlife along the trail.

The trail begins by following the bison paddock fence line along the valley. Then you start walking up a gradual slope along a mowed path that takes you through stands of chokecherry, saskatoon, buffaloberry, and snowberry. The climb soon becomes much steeper as the path heads up a hill next to the high fence of the bison enclosure.

The trail then curves around to a bench, a great place to rest and enjoy the view after the climb. In summer, the grassy hills are covered in wildflowers such as three-flowered avens, coneflower, golden bean, purple prairie clover or pink blazingstar. You'll also see large areas of silvery wolf



Boardwalk at Nicolle Flats Nature Area.

willow, and patches of fragrant sage. It's a gradual walk down the hill through aspen bluffs sprinkled with ash and maple, and eventually back to the parking lot.

Nicolle Flats Trail

Distance: 3 km one-way

Time: 2 hr one-way

Stretching along the south side of the marsh, this trail packs a lot of variety into a 3-km walk, including prairie grasslands, rolling hills, wooded coulees, a side-trip right into the marsh environment, and pioneer history at an early homestead.

Just past the trailhead you come to an observation deck on a bank overlooking the marsh. This is a good spot to spend a few minutes watching the activity on the marsh, which in summer is usually alive with ducks, marsh wrens, and possibly sora rails, American bitterns, muskrats, and beavers. Just below the small bank is the entrance to the boardwalk that extends far into the marsh for a closeup view of this rich habitat.

A series of informative panels along the boardwalk introduces you to plants, birds, and insects common to the marsh. Take your time and watch the flurry of activity among the cattails, bulrushes, and tall common reed grass. Listen for birds such as the common yellowthroat, or the harsh, shrill call of yellow-headed blackbirds that nest in the protection of the tall vegetation. Have a look at the surface of the water as well, and you might see whirligig beetles, water boatman, or dragonfly nymphs scurrying about.

Visitors not prepared to walk the entire distance of the Nicolle Flats Trail often come only as far as the boardwalk for a short half-hour outing.

Walking east along the main trail, you soon come to another observation deck overlooking the valley. Near the end of the trail is one of the highlights of the walk – the historic Nicolle homestead nestled in a coulee and surrounded by mature Manitoba maples.

Charles Nicolle and his family homesteaded here in the 1880s. After living in a tent, then a log house, they built an impressive stone house in 1903, which still stands today. All of the stones for the house came from