



Badlands

Solitary buttes with weather-beaten faces stand in defiance of centuries of erosion. Stone-capped hoodoos shelter pillars of fragile earth in stark valleys that seem from another world. Sage and cactus seek out moist cracks in sun-baked soil stingy with its life-giving sustenance. Such are Saskatchewan's badlands, "bad" perhaps in their grudging toleration of life, yet striking in their austere beauty.

Killdeer Badlands

Badlands dot the Saskatchewan landscape, primarily in the hot, semi-arid grasslands of the deep south. The Killdeer Badlands south of Wood Mountain are the "baddest" of them all – big, rough and untamed. Just north of the Montana border, the rolling grassland plateau suddenly drops into a deep valley with sharply gullied slopes and free-standing buttes. Some buttes have flat tops, remnants of the plateau that has disappeared around them. Others are



OPPOSITE AND ABOVE: *Killdeer Badlands.*

embellished with red or white cone-like tops, while a few are so whimsically shaped that they could pass for abstract art.

The eroded slopes reveal a geological story going back millions of years to when dinosaurs reigned. Indeed, it was in these fossil rich badlands that George Mercer Dawson, a geologist working with the Boundary Commission, discovered the first dinosaur bones in western Canada in 1874.

Sparse as it may seem, life continues in this arid land. Cattle graze on native grasses on

the plateau, then make the downhill trek to the valley bottom to water in tiny creeks that were once minor spillways created by glacial meltwater.

While most of the land in this area remains privately run pasture, some is part of the East Block of Grasslands National Park. Parks Canada is gradually expanding its holdings here as land comes up for sale.



The approach to Herbert Ferry Regional Park on the south shore of Lake Diefenbaker.

The Great Prairie Lake

When Gardiner Dam was completed in 1967, an enormous section of the South Saskatchewan River was flooded, creating Lake Diefenbaker. It is now the largest body of fresh water in southern Saskatchewan, with close to 800 kilometres of shoreline.

While the lake itself has artificial origins, much of the surrounding terrain remains in a natural state. Indeed, the vast tract of rangeland on the north shore which belonged to the great Matador Ranch in the early 1900s, is considered one of the last large uncultivated areas of native prairie on clay soils left in the Northern Plains.

ABOVE: Coyotes are common in the hills bordering Lake Diefenbaker.

RIGHT: Richardson's ground squirrels, commonly referred to as gophers, sound an alarm when danger is near.



All of the provincial and regional parks surrounding Lake Diefenbaker offer commanding views of the lake and countryside. Among our favorites is the awe-inspiring approach to Saskatchewan Landing Provincial Park on the west end of the lake. South of Kyle on Highway #4, the mostly level farmland suddenly drops into the deep broad valley, with sweeping views over the sharply sculpted ridges, vast stretches of native grasslands, wooded coulees and protected bays.

More incredible views are in store along the Coulee Trail, hiking up Brunyee Ridge, or just wandering in the hills where cactus blooms on the grassy slopes and majestic cottonwoods cluster around a moist creek bed. The strong scent of sage and the sweet smell of wolf willow and juniper blend into a distinctive prairie fragrance.

The varied habitats support wildlife such as mule deer, white-tailed deer, coyotes and pronghorn antelope, along with a wide array of waterfowl, songbirds and raptors. Rarities include yellow-breasted chats, lark sparrows and long-billed curlews.





ABOVE AND OPPOSITE: Driving along Highway #165 southeast of La Ronge, there's no hint of anything unusual as you cross the forest-fringed Nipekamew River. A narrow trail just east of the river leads you upstream through mixed woods of jack pine, black spruce and birch. Suddenly you emerge from the forest on the edge of a cliff where spires of brilliant white sand pillars



rise some 23 metres from the river below. Sediments deposited here 120 million years ago have been eroded and exposed by the river that once had considerably more flow and force than it does today. Consisting mostly of medium to coarse grain sandstone, these fragile formations have been sculpted into delicate shapes and contours.